A COMPANION TO

Eighteenth-Century Poetry

EDITED BY **CHRISTINE GERRARD**

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A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry

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BLACKWELL PUBLISHING
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148–5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

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First published 2006 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2006

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to eighteenth-century poetry / edited by Christine Gerrard.
p. cm.—(Blackwell companions to literature and culture ; 44)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-1-4051-1316-8 (hardback : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-4051-1316-2 (hardback : alk. paper)
1. English poetry—18th century—History and criticism. I. Gerrard, Christine. II. Series.
PR553C66 2006
821′.509—dc22
2005034701

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.
Set in 11 on 13 pt Garamond
by SNP Best-set Typesetter Ltd, Hong Kong
Printed and bound in Singapore
by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on
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www.blackwellpublishing.com

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Acknowledgments

This volume has been assembled at a difficult time of parental illness and loss. I am grateful to Blackwell, and particularly to Emma Bennett and Karen Wilson, for their patience at an inevitable delay in its production. One of the pleasures of undertaking an enterprise of this kind has been the opportunity to make close contact with so many colleagues who work in the field, both in the United Kingdom and in North America. It has enabled me to revive old friendships and initiate new ones – a model of amiable sociability of which early eighteenth-century coffee-house proprietors and patrons would thoroughly approve. I owe a debt to David Fairer for his early support for the project and his unceasing enthusiasm for eighteenth-century poetry, and to many of my Oxford colleagues, including Ros Ballaster, Abigail Williams, and Mina Gorji, for their willingness to be chivvied into contributions. I am particularly appreciative of the new insights into eighteenth-century poetry which the Oxford English MSt. Class on Politics and Poetry 1660–1750 yielded during its weekly Friday morning meetings during Michaelmas 2005. Especial thanks to John McTague, Steven Bernard, John West, Lawrence Williams, Claudine Van Hensbergen, and Ed Kenny. I am also grateful to the patient labors of Damian Love, Jenny Batt, and Gillian Somerscales, who have made this volume more accurate than it might otherwise have been. As ever, I am thankful for the daily support of the four men in my life.

C.G.

Introduction

Christine Gerrard

The landscape of eighteenth-century poetry has changed dramatically over recent decades. In the late 1970s it was not uncommon for undergraduates to advance week by week through a course represented, typically, by Dryden, Pope, Swift, Gay, and Johnson. Many students at that time – myself included – found something antipathetic in an "Augustan" canon that seemed overwhelmingly male, metropolitan, neoclassical, and conservative. Yet already there were hints of alternative perspectives. Charles Peake's evocatively titled anthology *Poetry of the Landscape and the Night* (1967) offered a glimpse of a different kind of eighteenth-century poetry – meditative, melancholic, descriptive, and subjective – while Pat Rogers's *Grub Street* (1972) reconstructed a refreshingly vulgar and material counter-culture to correctness and couplets. Views multiplied further in the 1980s, when the *New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse* (1984) and *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (1989), the fruits of Roger Lonsdale's inexhaustible efforts to recover from oblivion forgotten poetic voices – the voices of laborers, dissenters, provincial writers, and, most importantly, women – powerfully reinforced a growing awareness of the plurality and diversity of eighteenth-century poetic culture. The second of these anthologies showed for the first time the range and variety of poetry written by women during this period: women inspired and incensed in equal measure by their male models (primarily Pope and Swift). *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (1999, 2004), which I was fortunate enough to co-edit with David Fairer, attempted to recreate, through careful juxtapositions, a contemporary sense of male and female voices in poetic dialogue. Since the early 1980s editors, biographers, and critics have made steady progress toward placing the work of such important female poets as Jane Barker, Mary Chudleigh, Anne Finch, Mary Collier, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and Ann Yearsley in the public domain. It is a testament to the efforts of such dedicated scholars as Carol Barash, Margaret Ezell, Kathryn King, and Isobel Grundy that university English departments now frequently, even routinely, incorporate women poets of this period within their syllabuses.

These recent acts of literary retrieval have re-emphasized the relationship between text and print culture. A sequence of distinguished studies, including Margaret Ezell's *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (1999) and James McLaverty's *Pope, Print, and Meaning* (2001), have helped make readers newly aware of the processes by which texts were produced, assembled, and disseminated, ranging from an unexpectedly tenacious côterie manuscript culture to the popular marketplace for poetry in periodicals such as Edmund Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine*. Brean Hammond's lively *The Rise of Professional Imaginative Writing* (1997) explored the complex interdependencies of "high" and "low" literary culture. The boundary between a dominant literary culture and its subculture – charted in Rogers's *Grub Street* – was now seen to be unstable and fluctuating. In 1972 Rogers had affirmed Pope's aesthetic superiority to the "dunces" whom his *Dunciad* so confidently dismissed. Recent critical work, particularly on the Whig literary tradition, has revealed how the aesthetic value judgments we have inherited from Pope and his literary associates – judgments uncannily persistent in shaping later generations' perceptions of the period – were driven as much by political as by literary bias.

Some of the liveliest and most energetic work on eighteenth-century poetry has cut across, dismantled, and re-assembled in new and thought-provoking ways the poetic texts and trends of the period. Alongside the single-author study have flourished works such as Eric Rothstein's *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (1981) and Margaret Doody's *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (1982), which helped transform eighteenth-century poetry from an orderly, harmonious, and slightly dull field for humanist enquiry into a constantly surprising, sometimes unstable world in which such preoccupations as pain, pleasure, power, and metamorphosis exerted a powerful hold on the poetic imagination. David Fairer's wide-ranging *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century* (2003) similarly resists and counters rigid classifications, including the vexed issue of "Augustan" and "Pre-Romantic," by evincing evidence in the first three decades of the century of an early eighteenth-century romantic mode. The plethora of recent critical studies that have enriched and complicated the traditional equation of eighteenth-century poetry with political satire by emphasizing the political inflections of other genres and modes (landscape poetry, the ode, the epic, and the lyric) have also served to loosen the bonds around the eighteenth century as a "period." Dryden's artificially buoyant lines from the *Secular Masque*, written a month before his death in 1700 – " 'Tis well the old age is past, 'tis time to begin the new" – might serve to suggest, like the ill-fated millennium celebrations of the year 2000, that any attempt to construct a period boundary along a century divide is bound to fail. As chapter 1 will show, poets of the first three decades of the new century carried with them the legacy of the post-Civil War and Restoration years in their shared preoccupation with party politics and dynastic uncertainties. The genres and forms that came to dominate verse in the middle and later century – the ode, and especially Miltonic blank verse as it evolved through Thomson's *The Seasons*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, Cowper's *The Task*, and eventually Wordsworth's *The Prelude* – derive from the generic experimentation of the Civil War period. The preoccupation with

the sublime, as Shaun Irlam shows (chapter 37), stretches back into the seventeenth century and forward into the nineteenth. Poets at both ends of the century were capable of producing public poetry and political satire. As Carolyn Williams shows in chapter 35, the century began, as it would end, with an attempt to recuperate the antiquarian past – in Dryden's 1700 adaptation of "Palamon and Arcite," a chivalric epic from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

The essays in this *Companion* are arranged in four sections. The first offers a series of contexts – aesthetic, cultural, economic, political, and religious – for reading and understanding eighteenth-century poetry. The second section contains a sequence of close readings of individual texts, pairs of texts, or groups of texts. The choice of these has been determined in part by their ready availability to readers of *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, to which this *Companion* is designed to be what its title proclaims. But the texts in "Readings" go far beyond those included in the *Anthology*, encouraging readers to range more widely. The third section pays attention to a number of different genres and modes that recur through the eighteenth century. The final section, "Themes and Debates," picks up a number of strands of argument and investigation that run through current critical work on eighteenth-century poetry, such as Whig and Tory poetics, the role of the sublime, the self-taught tradition, the constructions of femininity, and the uses of the past.

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PART I
Contexts and Perspectives

1
Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party

Christine Gerrard

Party politics and dynastic uncertainty shaped the lives of writers born in the immediate aftermath of the Civil Wars. For poets such as Alexander Pope, Anne Finch, Jonathan Swift, and Matthew Prior, a sense of the political was thus deeply ingrained. Swift, born in 1667 and dying in 1745, lived through the reigns of no fewer than six English monarchs – Charles II, James II, William III, Queen Anne, George I, and George II. On at least two occasions he had a price on his head for his interventions in English and Irish politics. Alexander Pope, born in 1688, the year in which the Dutch Protestant William of Orange's bloodless coup ousted the Catholic James II from the English throne, suffered the direct consequences of that so-called "Glorious Revolution" – the punitive Williamite legislation against Catholics affecting rights of residence, worship, and university education. So did Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720), who lost her Court post serving James's wife Mary of Modena: as non-jurors (those who refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the new regime), she and her husband went on the run, and her husband was arrested for Jacobitism. Matthew Prior (1664–1721), the most important English poet in the decade following Dryden's death in 1700, enjoyed a distinguished diplomatic career under William and his successor Queen Anne. Yet at George I's accession in 1714, Prior, like many of his Tory friends, faced a vendetta from the new Whig administration: refusing to implicate his friends in allegations of support for the Stuart dynasty, he was impeached and spent two years in close custody.

Yet if political events changed the lives of the poets, poets saw themselves as agents of political change. Poetry of all kinds – highbrow and lowbrow, satires, odes, panegyrics, ballads – proliferated during the restored monarchy of Charles II, especially after the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1679. The growing prominence of the poet as political commentator, satirist, propagandist, and panegyrist was both a cause and a consequence of the inexorable rise of party politics during Charles's reign. During the 1670s a two-party political system developed from the clashes between Charles and his political supporters on the one hand and, on the other, the parliamentary pressure

group led by the first Earl of Shaftesbury, driven by opposition to the succession of Charles's Catholic brother James. During the "Exclusion Crisis" this pressure group – soon to be known as the Whigs – pushed for legislation to exclude James from the throne. Loyal supporters of the King's cause earned themselves the name of Tories. Both Whig and Tory were originally terms of abuse derived from the Celtic fringe. Like many of the other political terms prevalent in this period – Court, Country, Patriot – they were subject to constant scrutiny, debate, and redefinition. The intensity of political engagement that characterizes poetry of the period 1660–1750 testifies to the growing confidence felt by male and female poets alike in their right to voice political opinions and their ability to change the course of history: a sense of empowerment which was itself a product of the loosening of social hierarchies in the decades after the Civil Wars. Poets between Dryden in the 1660s and Pope in the 1730s – and even as late as Charles Churchill in the 1760s – helped alter the direction of politics, whether it meant (as in Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* of 1681) discrediting the nascent Whig party and affirming Stuart legitimacy, popularizing the new Hanoverian dynasty at German George I's accession in 1714, or compelling the first minister Robert Walpole to declare war against Spain in 1739. To poets of this period, the modern separation of the political and the aesthetic realms would have seemed entirely alien.

Critical Debates

Scholarship of the past three decades has enriched and complicated our understanding of eighteenth-century political history. Debates that began in the 1980s and still reverberate today have challenged traditional preconceptions of the eighteenth century as a period of stability and complacency. Linda Colley's pioneering work on Britishness, which stimulated wide-ranging discussions of national identity, examined the ways in which the 1707 Act of Union forged a sense of nationhood in which distinctive Scottish, Welsh, and Irish allegiances were subsumed under a larger sense of Britain as a Protestant nation pitted against Catholic France (Colley 1992). Britain's growing confidence as an imperial power has been the subject of some broad-ranging studies of empire [*see* ch. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"]. Revisionist historians such as J. C. D. Clark, debating the nature and impact of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, have argued controversially that England remained a static, confessional state, still dominated by the Anglican Church and not altered substantially by secularization, urbanization, or proto-democratic parliamentary change (Clark 1985). Both revisionist historians and historians of nationhood placed a renewed emphasis, for different ends, on the importance of monarchy: its rituals, its court culture, its literature. The tradition of Tory political satire centered on Dryden, Pope, Swift, and Johnson was reanimated by debates over the extent to which any or all of these writers remained secretly committed to the exiled House of Stuart. Jacobitism, once dismissed as an antiquarian idyll, was again taken seriously by some (not all) historians and literary scholars. Critics such as Howard Erskine-Hill and Murray Pittock mined the writ-

ings of all the major male poets in the canon for evidence of Jacobite innuendo and symbolism (Erskine-Hill 1981–2, 1982, 1984, 1996; Pittock 1994). Other critics compensated for the comparative neglect of the literary culture of the Whig party which dominated British political life between 1688 and 1760 (Womersley 1997, 2005; Williams 2005). Their work established the contours of a modern, forward-looking Whig cultural agenda embracing piety, politeness, and patriotism. Poets such as Richard Blackmore, Thomas Tickell, and Ambrose Philips, familiar as the butt of Pope's satire on "dull" writers, are now seen to have participated in, and even prompted, a dialectic with Tory poetry and criticism.

Pioneering work by critics such as Carol Barash, Kathryn King, and Sarah Prescott has enlarged the field of enquiry to include the work of women poets, once entirely absent from critical accounts of poetry and politics in this period. Barash's seminal work on late seventeenth-century women poets – Aphra Behn, Katherine Phillips, Mary Chudleigh, Jane Barker, and Anne Finch – emphasized their Tory, royalist, and Jacobite affiliations and their associations with queens and consorts such as Mary of Modena and Queen Anne (Barash 1996). More recent work has begun to reconstruct the lives and works of female poets writing in the Whig tradition. As Prescott has shown (2005b), Elizabeth Singer Rowe and Susannah Centlivre greeted the new order under William III with enthusiasm, advancing a cultural and political agenda that was essentially Protestant, militaristic, and modern. Centlivre, a firm supporter of the Hanoverian succession, subsequently produced some stringently anti-Jacobite verse. George II's intellectual and ambitious consort, Caroline of Anspach, became a muse figure for male and female Protestant Whig poets as well as the satiric butt of male Tory satirists. As King asserts, women poets participated in a wide range of different political discourses – republican, Whig, Tory, Jacobite – and a range of genres: satire, pamphlets, panegyrics, and odes (King 2003).

Many of the subsequent essays in this volume – notably those by Suvir Kaul (ch. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"), John Morillo (ch. 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"), Brean Hammond (ch. 27, "Verse Satire"), Margaret Koehler (ch. 28, "The Ode"), Juan Pellicer (ch. 29, "The Georgic"), Abigail Williams (ch. 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics"), and Gerard Carruthers (ch. 41, "Poetry Beyond the English Borders") – show how the relationship between poetry and politics in this period informs genre and permeates, even generates, aesthetic debate. A number of essays in the "Readings" section (Part II) place individual texts or pairs of texts in their context and offer a detailed interpretation of their political implications. The present essay is designed primarily as an introduction to such debates by offering a chronological discussion of poetic responses to major political events and concerns in the period covered by this volume.

The Rage of Party under Queen Anne

Although Matthew Prior heralded the year 1700 with his optimistic panegyric *Carmen Seculare*, dynastic uncertainty underscored the advent of the new century.

Mary Chudleigh's "On the Death of his Highness the Duke of Glocester" mourned the loss that July of eleven-year-old William, last surviving child of Princess Anne, heir to the throne. The child's death also buried Tory hopes for a continuation of a Protestant Stuart dynasty. The following year, 1701, the Act of Settlement decreed that in default of issue to either William or Anne, the crown would pass to Sophia, Electress of Hanover, and to "the heirs of her body being Protestants." Anne succeeded William in 1702 following his sudden death by a fall from his horse (an act of God, according to some Jacobites). The text from Isaiah 49: 23 delivered at her coronation – "Kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their queens thy nursing-mothers" – threw into sharp relief the tragic facts of Anne's maternal failure (seventeen pregnancies and five births) and her increasingly poor health. Finch's "A Pindarick Poem Upon the Hurricane" (Fairer and Gerrard 2004: 26–33), written shortly after the Great Storm of 1703 caused devastation across the south of England, registers a profound sense of unease and dislocation. Unlike her better-known "Nocturnal Rêverie," "Upon the Hurricane" is a bold public poem – a Pindaric ode – which draws analogies between the natural and political spheres to meditate on the upheavals of post-Civil War England. Finch's storm-damaged landscape subverts the idealized emblematic order of traditional loco-descriptive poems such as Denham's *Cooper's Hill* and Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, "Where Order in Variety we see, / And where, tho' all things differ, all agree" (ll. 15–16). The lofty pine tree, destined for British naval service, and the oak (symbol of Stuart monarchy), "so often storm'd," both fall victim to apocalyptic violence. Finch's poem, echoing the Puritan providentialism that sees the hand of God, the "Great Disposer," at work everywhere, depicts the hurricane as the "Scourge" of the "Great Jehova" (l. 110).Yet exactly who or what is being punished? In lines 96–111 Finch cautiously ventures ("we think") that the death from a collapsing chimney of Richard Kidder, new Bishop of Bath and Wells (a recent Whig replacement for the popular non-juror Thomas Ken), may have been a divine judgment. Yet the poem refuses to advance a partisan reading. It contains teasing fragments of seventeenth-century political thought (echoes of Dryden's and Rochester's Hobbesian vision of mankind naturally drawn to "wild Confusion" and "lawless Liberty" in pursuit of their "Fellow-Brutes"), and draws parallels between the destructive forces of the storm and the destructive forces of war (the thunder resembles "The Soldier's threatning Drum," l. 141). Yet Finch's hurricane transcends the petty world of party politics, placing it in perspective: "Nor WHIG, nor TORY now the rash Contender calls" (l. 177). It is an idea that Swift was later to echo in his mock-georgic "Description of a City Shower" (1710), written soon after the Tory election victory of that year. Swift shrinks Finch's hurricane to a London downpour; in a world more urbane and less violent than Finch's, social etiquette and dry clothes dictate a political truce: "Triumphant Tories, and desponding Whigs, / Forget their feuds, and join to save their Wigs" (Fairer and Gerrard 2004: 76).

Three major factors sharpened Whig/Tory divisions under Queen Anne: religious controversy, dynastic politics, and war. The close relationship between the Tory party and the High Church was cemented by the trial in 1709 of the High Church Tory

Dr. Henry Sacheverell for preaching a sermon in St. Paul's implying that the Church was unsafe in the hands of the Whig administration. The trial rebounded on the government – support for Sacheverell was so strong that a Tory ministry was elected on its back which lasted from 1710 to Queen Anne's death in 1714. The War of the Spanish Succession, distinguished by the brilliant continental military victories of the Queen's general John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, remained a potent theme for Whig poets, who fanned the flames of patriotic fervor in panegyrics celebrating the slaughter of enemy troops amid "rivers of blood." Addison's *The Campaign* (1705), apotheosizing Marlborough in the thick of battle (he "Rides in the whirl-wind, and directs the storm," like the God of Psalm 104), represented a new mode of Whig verse – biblical rather than classical, Miltonically sublime, a self-confident affirmation of British national destiny. Yet by 1710 high taxation and national debt had left many people war-weary. Jonathan Swift's brilliant propaganda exercises for the Tories discredited the "Junto" of Whigs around Marlborough and Godolphin by accusing them of prolonging the war for their own financial gain. His famous *Examiner* essay 16 (Nov. 23, 1710), inspired by Marlborough's complaints of ingratitude for his military services, juxtaposed in account-book style "A Bill of ROMAN Gratitude" (a crown of laurels, a statue, a trophy, and so forth) with "A Bill of BRITISH Ingratitude" (Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, "Employments," "Pictures," "Jewels"). In his suggestively titled "Sid Hamet: or the Magician's Rod" (1710), a satire on the former Treasurer Sidney Godolphin, Swift gave a further spin to the "Tory myth," prevalent since Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, of the Whig leaders as duplicitous magicians deceiving an unwary public – a myth that was to reach its apogee in 1730s opposition satires on Robert Walpole.

Party politics polarized literary affiliations during the last four years of Anne's reign. Political friendships were formalized by the creation of partisan literary clubs: Addison's "Little Senate" of Whigs met at Button's coffee-house; the Tory wits, who eventually formed the Scriblerus Club, at Will's. Pope's former friendships with leading Whig writers came to an abrupt end over the so-called "pastoral controversy," which boosted sales of Ambrose Philips's assertively Whig pastorals rather than Pope's apolitical (perhaps quietly Jacobite) pastorals published in the same volume of Tonson's *Miscellanies* in 1709. The same quality also permeates Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, written to celebrate the Treaty of Utrecht concluded in April 1713. The peace itself became a site of literary partisan conflict (Williams 2005; Rogers 2005). Tory diplomacy sealed the peace, but Whig poets claimed the war's victorious conclusion as their party's unique achievement. The Whig Thomas Tickell's best-selling *The Prospect of Peace* celebrates the war itself as much as the conclusion to hostilities, whereas Pope's poem, with its emphases on the arts of peace and its displacement of real political events by mythological episodes such as the rape of Lodona and the leisure pursuit of hunting, locates the peace in a larger humanist meditation on war, peace, and man's irrepressibly violent energies. It is only the poem's stubbornly intractable assertion of a dynastic register – "And Peace and Plenty tell, a STUART reigns" (l. 42) – that gives the poem an unapologetically Tory Jacobite edge.

Hanoverians and Whigs

In the last years of Anne's reign Tories were forced to face the unpalatable prospect of a Whig-friendly German monarchy. The Whigs had jockeyed for favor with the Hanoverian family through diplomatic missions to Herrenhausen: both Ambrose Philips and his patron the Earl of Dorset belonged to the Whig "Hanover Club." Even John Gay, Pope's and Swift's impecunious friend, traveling as secretary to Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, paid court to the incoming royal family in hopes of poetic preferment. Within a few weeks of Anne's death on 1 August 1714 the die was cast. George I formed his new ministry almost entirely of Whigs. Lord Bolingbroke, who only the week before Anne's death had emerged victorious from his party leadership struggle with his rival Robert Harley, fled to the "Pretender" James's service in France – where he remained, proscribed and stripped of his title, for the next decade. Harley was sent to the Tower and Prior was impeached. Many Tory poets suffered a profound sense of loss and displacement. Swift and Parnell, two Irish members of the Scriblerus Club, returned to Ireland. Pope kept out of politics virtually altogether for another fourteen years, most of which were spent in the enterprise which was to create the foundation for his financial and hence political independence – his lucrative subscription edition of his Homer translations.

However, many other poets, of all political stripes rushed to greet the new monarchy in enthusiastic verse. There were at least fifty panegyrics published on George I's accession, for which the ground had been laid by the Act of Settlement thirteen years earlier and which proved less fraught by interpretative difficulties than William III's seizure of the throne from James II. Despite some anxieties about another "foreign" master, the accession of George I, with his ready-made Protestant dynasty (by 1714 he was already a grandfather of four) secured the future of Protestantism in Britain. If the Whigs under William and Anne celebrated a militant and militaristic patriotism, then Whig poets under the Hanoverians founded their sense of patriotism on peace, liberty, and prosperity, exemplified by Centlivre's *Poem. Humbly Presented to His most Sacred Majesty George, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland. Upon His Accession to the Throne* [*see* ch. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"].

The Rise of Patriotism

The accession of the Hanoverians effectively marked the start of a half-century of Whig rule in which a succession of Whig ministers (most famously Robert Walpole) consolidated Whig oligarchy through measures such as the Septennial Act of 1716, which stipulated a seven-year interval between elections. Yet the Whigs did not enjoy power unopposed. It is from the seeds of resistance and opposition to Whig rule – by 1739, an overwhelming clamor – that some of the liveliest and most imaginative political poetry of the eighteenth century emerged. As early as 1720, the year in which

mass popular financial speculation through investment in the South Sea Company and other schemes had ended with what was widely perceived to be national ruin, opponents of the Whig administration were developing a political critique founded on a sense of civic virtue. "Cato's Letters," published in the *London Journal* of 1720–1, looked back to seventeenth-century political theorists such as James Harrington for their critique of modern Britain. This tradition emphasized the fragility of Britain's balanced constitution of monarch, lords, and commons: corruption, once it had gained entrance, would – if unchecked – eventually lead to national ruin. From this civic-humanist critique evolved an ideology familiarly known as "patriotism." Patriotism entailed constant vigilance, a suspicion of anything that threatened the independence of the Commons, particularly corruption. It came to embrace a deep suspicion of the institutional consequences of the late seventeenth-century financial revolution: the credit systems established to fund William III's costly Nine Years War, the Bank of England, the National Debt, and large City finance houses such as the South Sea Company. Patriotism as a political credo and an ideology designed to unite disparate opponents of the Whig hegemony came to its full maturity from 1725 onwards, when it received a succinct and potent formulation in pamphlets and newspapers such as *The Craftsman* (edited by Bolingbroke and the opposition Whig William Pulteney). It is ironic that the widespread political usage of the terms "patriotism" and "Patriot," evoking a sense of national unity, emerges from the growth of faction and party, and the concomitant disagreement about who truly represents the nation's interests. Patriotism in its political sense is the child of party politics. In 1681 Dryden, as Tory propagandist for Charles II, vilified the ambitious Whig leader Shaftesbury as a Patriot in the "modern" sense – one who cloaks his political ambition as love of his country. In 1700, by now a disempowered opponent of William III, Dryden used the term "Patriot" in an oppositional sense to praise his moderate backbench MP cousin John Driden.

The Collapse of the Bubble

In 1721 Pope's friend Bishop Berkeley berated the South Sea Bubble with his apocalyptically entitled *An Essay Toward Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain*. Britons, once "enemies to luxury" and "lovers of their country," had become "degenerated, servile flatterers of men in power, venal, corrupt, injurious." The Englishman's habit of thinking in providential patterns, a legacy from the Civil Wars, interpreted the collapse of the South Sea Company and the concomitant loss of personal fortunes as God's punishment for national greed, just as Puritans in the 1660s interpreted the Plague and the Great Fire as punishments for the Restoration of Charles II.

The South Sea Bubble derived its name from the runaway fashion for purchase of shares in the South Sea Company, a company which in fact had no genuine capital. The "stockjobber" – the trader in stocks and shares, a familiar fixture in Exchange Alley – collected subscriptions for many other increasingly implausible get-rich-quick

investment schemes. Among the subscribers to South Sea stock were Pope, Swift, and Gay, seeking financial stability amid the uncertainties of the writer's life. When a sudden loss of public confidence led to a collapse in South Sea stock and a run on the banks in September 1720, London suffered its first ever stock market crash. Although poets participated in the general vilification of the South Sea directors which followed, many exploited the rich metaphoric and imaginative potential of the Bubble. Swift's Bubble poems conflate the worlds of financial speculation and poetic fantasy, both worlds potentially derived from the irrational impulse that intrigued him. Anne Finch's unpublished "A Ballad {upon the South Sea affair}" (MS Harleian 7316, fos. 54^{r}–55^{r}) reflects interestingly on the gender implications of the Bubble. Women formed a substantial percentage of those investing in South Sea stock, a form of "labor" or "ownership" immune to the usual restrictions imposed upon female ownership of property or land. In Finch's ballad, female stockjobbers make an unusual appearance: they defy gender expectations of social propriety and the niceties of dress by setting up stall in 'Change Alley, "Without staying for prayers or their Patches {beauty spots} put on." In this jaunty, impromptu ballad Finch hints:

> There's a Bubble set up of Copper & Brass
> Of which at the Head was his Highness late was
> But some have no need on't they have so much on their face
> Which nobody can deny &c.

The lines allude to Prince George (later George II)'s directorship of another "bubble," the Welsh Copper Company. But the veiled allusion to those who have "so much on their face" is, of course, a reference to Robert Walpole, early nicknamed the "screen of brass" for his cool ability to cover up scandal by deflecting criticism of the South Sea Bubble away from the royal family and restoring confidence in the government.

Walpole and His Opponents

Walpole's opportunistic rise to power followed the respective death and resignation in 1721 of his rivals Stanhope and Sunderland. Over the next twenty years he forged a de facto prime ministerial role from his combined offices of Chancellor of the Exchequer, Leader of the Commons, and King's adviser. Walpole enjoyed the confidence and trust first of the German-speaking George I and then, after 1727, of his son George II and his powerful wife Queen Caroline. Walpole's steady hand enabled British trade to flourish and the country's commercial prosperity to increase without the crippling expense of the wars that had drained the national economy between 1690 and 1714. Historical hindsight makes it difficult to sympathize excessively with the large number of his opponents – both politicians and poets – who called for his resignation during the course of his long period in office. Samuel Johnson, a hot-headed "Patriot" in his youth, whose *London* of 1738 blasted the corruption of the times, rapidly back-

pedaled from his former opposition stance soon after Walpole's fall from power in 1742. Like Henry Fielding, another erstwhile opponent of Walpole who went on to describe him as "one of the best of men and of ministers," Johnson came to think better of Walpole and far worse of the so-called "Patriots" as Britain became embroiled in an expensive and unsuccessful war against Spain. However, Walpole's very personal style of government, autocratic and opaque in its operations (he was often satirized as "screening" all kinds of political corruption and acting as puppet-master for state affairs), inevitably provoked calls for greater transparency amid accusations that he was yet another "royal favorite," a power-hungry commoner who filled his own coffers at the public expense. The scale of Walpole's impressive stately residence in his home county of Norfolk, Houghton, stuffed with art treasures from across the world, did little to dispel such accusations.

Walpole's habit of quashing opposition to his parliamentary measures by dismissing renegade Whigs from their political offices earned him a new set of opponents: former colleagues who, during the 1720s and 1730s, came to swell the ranks of the Patriot opposition. Some were pushed, and others jumped. Lord Cobham, one of the powerful Whig aristocrats, resigned in 1732 in protest at Walpole's refusal to countenance a further inquiry into the South Sea Company. Walpole's decision to strip the military hero of his regimental honors caused a wave of hostility, and Cobham used his extensive family connections to bolster support: a circle of nephews, nicknamed "Cobham's Cubs" or the "Boy Patriots," joined the ranks of the opposition as soon as they entered Parliament, forming a flying squad to harangue Walpole. This circle, which cohered around Frederick, Prince of Wales, formed a magnet for opposition poets such as James Thomson, David Mallet, Mark Akenside, even Pope.

The question remains as to why so many leading poets came out in opposition – some of it vitriolic – to Walpole's administration. All the leading male writers of the day – Pope, Gay, Swift, Thomson, Akenside, Fielding, Johnson, and lesser-known figures such as Richard Glover, David Mallet, and Aaron Hill – joined the swelling criticism of Walpole. Thomson, a staunch Whig and previously a loyal follower of Walpole, turned his hostility on the ministry in 1729 with his *Britannia*, which attacked Walpole's reluctance to stop Spanish ships from intercepting British trade – just a year after the ministry had rewarded the poet with a £50 gift for his elegy on Newton, giving him every chance of becoming one of "Sir Robert Walpole's Poets." For poets of the 1730s, the distinction between "Whig" and "Tory" now seemed less relevant than a broader sense of cultural politics. Many writers, whatever their political persuasion, associated Walpole with the deliberate downgrading of the cultural marketplace: when the "money" culture came to dominate the arts and all that mattered was the quick "bob" to be turned, then poets turned to defend the status of their own art. Correspondence of the 1730s between the Whig literary entrepreneur Aaron Hill, himself a former theater impresario, and the Tory Catholic Alexander Pope shows that they shared a common idiom of cultural degeneration. They both agreed that the appointment as Poet Laureate in 1730 of the comic actor and playwright Colley Cibber, and the widespread pandering to the popular taste with garish

and showy pantomimes which had displaced the market for decent theater, pointed to a serious decline in cultural standards. Walpole's own combination of an apparent indifference to poets with a readiness to pay for useful ministerial propaganda ("A Pamphlet in Sir *Bob*'s Defence / Will never fail to bring in Pence," as Swift remarked in 1733) differed in extent and kind from the network of political patronage which had flourished under William III and continued into Anne's reign, distributed by such patrons as Dorset, Montague, and Halifax. Whereas under previous Whig regimes poets had had a stake in imagining and creating a forward-looking vision of modern British greatness, Walpole's writers were at best paid to defend narrow ministerial policies and to attack his critics. Public panegyric, which had distinguished the previous Whig ministries, now became the butt of opposition satire as the kind of poetry that (as Swift goes on to instruct in his "On Poetry: A Rapsody") can be turned out according to set formulae for flattery.

Thus it was that Walpole's critics – even his Whiggish critics – participated in reviving and perpetuating a myth of cultural "dullness" around Walpole's Britain which was enshrined most powerfully in Pope's *The Dunciad*. Although opposition poetry of the 1720s and 1730s came in a variety of forms, and Whiggish Patriot writers preferred to rouse patriotic feeling through the loftier precepts of epic and heroic verse (Glover's *Leonidas* or Thomson's *Liberty*), satire remained the dominant mode. Under Walpole, satire reached an apogee never to be achieved again after 1742. Walpole's long spell in power, his distinctive and personalized style of government, and a set of readily parodiable physical features made him a perfect target for political satire: there is a point at which anti-Walpole satire acquires an aesthetic life of its own, created from a network of correspondences, allusions, and innuendo. In a still unrivaled study of Pope, Maynard Mack described it as "an argot whose variations were inexhaustible . . . it had . . . an interior coherence which made it possible in touching one string to strike another too, or even to set them all vibrating without, apparently, touching any" (Mack 1969: 134). This argot was shared by other forms of visual culture, especially theater and popular prints. The Finch ballad on the Bubble hinting at the "brass" face is an instance of this – as is Pope's account in *The Dunciad* of the "wizard old" casting a spell over the nation which makes it fall into a profound sleep:

> With that, a WIZARD OLD his *Cup* extends;
> Which whoso tastes, forgets his former friends,
> Sir, Ancestors, Himself.
>
> (iv. 517–19)

There are echoes here of high culture – Spenser's wizard Archimago, his seductive Acrasia in the Bower of Bliss, herself modeled on Homer's Circe, who turns men into swine with her magic potion – as well as a whole history of anti-Whig writing which casts Whigs as wizards. These images are mirrored in low or popular visual culture, such as the notorious (obscene) print *The Festival of the Golden Rump*, published in

1737, which shows a large-bellied wizard (Walpole) officiating at a pseudo-religious ceremony around the naked buttocks of George II. The richly allusive nature of political satire directed against Walpole was made possible by the length of his time in office. This tradition of visual and verbal satire emerged again briefly in the Wilkesite satire of the 1760s, targeted at Lord Bute; but the monotonously phallic emphasis of the Bute prints and squibs is a poor substitute for the imaginative wit and irony of Walpolian satire.

Few women poets participated in the literary opposition to Walpole. Satire, with its connotations of obscenity and malice, was still deemed an inappropriate mode for women poets [*see* ch. 27, "Verse Satire"]. Yet the issues are more complex. Arguably, there was very little in the Patriot agenda to appeal to women. Glover's *Leonidas*, with its model of Spartan self-abnegation and its emphasis on male bonding, reflects at one level the nature of the friendships among Bolingbroke, Pope, and their circle. Pope's admiring letters to the youthful Earl of Marchmont and other young "Boy Patriots" hint at an almost homoerotic infatuation. The Patriots' political cliquiness and assertive masculinity would have excluded female participation. Kathryn King, noting the decline in female public writing from the 1720s onwards, speculates that the complex of cultural shifts transforming Britain into a commercial empire during this period had transformed women into consumers – beneficiaries rather than critics of the new-found prosperity of Walpolian Britain (King 2003: 218). Female poets who did write public verse tended to be loyalist in their sympathies, often addressing their works to Queen Caroline. Caroline, who had wide-ranging cultural interests, including theology, art, and poetry, was one of the few monarchs to offer patronage to poets such as Richard Savage and Stephen Duck. The Welsh poet Jane Brereton, under her *nom de plume* "Melissa," celebrated Queen Caroline's erection of "Merlin's Cave," her garden building in Richmond Park, linking herself as Welsh poet with the Hanoverians' attempts to graft themselves onto British and even Celtic roots (Prescott 2005a). Caroline, as fertile mother of nine children and a female intellectual of Enlightenment tastes, gave the traditional courtly focus for female poetic aspiration a distinctively modern twist. It was Caroline in this incarnation who fueled the Tory Pope's reactionary and nightmarish vision of the monstrous Queen Dulness / Caroline in Book IV of *The Dunciad*, first published in 1742, swallowing authors and culture in a parody of inverse reproduction.

It is perhaps instructive that the only female poet who could rival Pope and Swift in satirical edginess, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, was a Court Whig. The only political satire she published at the time, "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of . . . Horace" (co-authored with the waspish Lord Hervey), undermined Pope's claims to moral integrity as the basis for his satires. Less well known are her unpublished "P[ope] to Bolingbroke" and "The Reasons that Induc'd Dr S[wift] to write a Poem call'd the Lady's Dressing room" – two poems on Pope and Swift respectively which hit well below the belt with their intuitively female understanding of the weak points of each man: Swift's meanness and misogyny, and the middle-class Pope's yearning for aristocratic élan, exposed in her parody of his obsequious reverence for the High

Tory Viscount Bolingbroke. Her untitled fragment "Her palace plac'd beneath a muddy road," co-authored with Henry Fielding, reworks the fantasy landscape of Pope's *Dunciad*, inverting its political values: the poem reattributes "Dulness" not to modern Whigs, but to the aptly named Catholic Alexander Pope and his literary cronies, bemired in centuries of "monkish" superstition. For Montagu, it is Whiggish writers such as Milton and Addison who have refined English taste and led the nation toward intellectual enlightenment, political liberty, and politeness.

The Decline of Patriotism

Opposition writing reached the peak of its intensity in 1738 with a flood of poems published that year – notably Samuel Johnson's *London*, Paul Whitehead's *Manners*, Akenside's *The Voice of Liberty: A British Philippic*, and Pope's two dialogues of the *Epilogue to the Satires*, in which he depicts himself as defending his country single-handedly and heroically against the tide of corruption and indifference: his quirkiness is "so odd, my Country's Ruin makes me grave." In 1739 Walpole was finally forced to declare war against Spain, a war which afforded a brief moment of triumph with Admiral Vernon's victories in 1740 at Porto Bello (inspiration for Thomson's famous opposition lyric "Rule, Britannia!"), but then saw British losses following Admiral Vernon's disastrous siege of Cartagena in 1741 that finally led to Walpole's resignation in 1742. This long-awaited event, however, did not usher in some glorious Patriot administration drawn impartially from the best men of both parties, but instead offered a less distinguished version of Whig politics as usual. The former Patriots William Pulteney and John, Lord Carteret, were widely castigated for "selling out," one for a peerage and one for the key role in the new Whig administration. As Pope sardonically remarked in his unpublished "One Thousand Seven Hundred and Forty," written as rumors circulated about Pulteney's promised reward for renouncing his patriotism, he who "foams a Patriot" will soon "subside a Peer." Patriotism as a public and political idiom became downgraded to the secondary definition of the epithet added by the former Patriot Johnson to his *Dictionary*: "a factious disturber of the government."

In the shifting political sands of the post-Walpole era, it became increasingly difficult for poets to make assertive public gestures. Although, as Dustin Griffin has shown, none of the mid-eighteenth-century poets – Gray, Collins, Akenside, Goldsmith – could be described as "apolitical," all expressed an ambivalence about conventional expressions of patriotic emotion, epitomized by Goldsmith's definition of himself as "half a patriot" (Griffin 2002: 206). The major political event of the 1740s – the so-called Forty-Five, the Jacobite uprising whose bloody defeat at Culloden effectively ended all hopes for a Stuart restoration – proved, at least for poets, more problematic than any previous military conflict of the first half of the century. Henry Fielding's journal the *True Patriot*, written at the height of the Highland army's attempted invasion of the north, chronicles the creeping Catholicization of Protestant England and the real threat to national security. Staunch Whig poets such as Mark

Akenside and Edward Young shared Fielding's detestation of the "Pope-bred Princeling" who aspired "To cut his Passage to the *British Throne*" (*The Complaint . . . Night the Eighth*, p. 127). Yet poets such as Collins and Johnson, writing in the aftermath of the Jacobite defeat, with its brutal retributions against Bonny Prince Charlie's followers, found it hard to celebrate an untroubled patriotism. William "the Butcher," the Duke of Cumberland, was no Marlborough. Collins's "Ode to Liberty," ostensibly about the War of Austrian Succession but written shortly after the Jacobite defeat, shows a "ravaged" Britain which welcomes Liberty in feminized rather than martial form. Johnson's great philosophical poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) delicately places allusions to recent political events within a larger pattern of flawed human ambition and political aspiration.

The Seven Years War of 1756–63 enhanced Britain's self-perception as an imperial world power. An ignominious early phase – the loss of Minorca to the French – was followed by victories that saw the British taking Canada and India from France and capturing Manila and Havana from Spain. Yet although patriotic georgics such as Dyer's *The Fleece* (1756) and Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* (1764) captured the national mood of imperialist expectation, it is surprising that not more poets produced ambitious "anthems of empire." Thomas Gray, though a supporter of Pitt, a grandson of a wealthy East India merchant, and born into a Whig elite, remained reticent about "trade." In this he shared the ambivalence, even hostility, of Oliver Goldsmith, for whom "Trade's unfeeling train" was the source of national ruin. *The Deserted Village* (1770) draws on the civic-humanist tradition familiar to opposition poets of the 1720s and 1730s in linking commercial prosperity with national corruption and the insidious growth of "luxury." Yet unlike Thomson's *Liberty* (1735–6), Goldsmith's attack on luxury emanates from a sense of personal loss, real or imagined: the loss of his childhood community, a place where he enjoyed an assured social standing and a clearly defined audience. In this *The Deserted Village* serves to dramatize a recurrent dilemma for post-Walpole era poets: the quest to define both an audience and a meaningful public role. In his letter to James Beattie, author of *The Minstrel*, the first part of which appeared in 1771, a year after *The Deserted Village*, Gray suggested that Beattie's aspiring poet-hero should be made to perform "some singular deed for the service of his country (what service I must leave to your invention)." Yet Gray himself, offered the opportunity of becoming Poet Laureate, declined. Although his odes, particularly "The Bard," evoke a heroic age in which poets sought an elevated public role, the anonymously published satires on corrupt and widely discredited public figures which Gray produced in his later years – "The Candidate" (1764) and "On Lord Holland's Seat" (1769) – did not aspire to this model.

Wilkes, Churchill, and the Nonsense Club

Gray's "The Candidate" was one of numerous squibs on the sexually decadent Earl of Sandwich, the government candidate for the High Stewardship of Cambridge. Charles Churchill, ardent supporter of the radical MP John Wilkes, also attacked

Sandwich in an identically titled poem of the same year, provoked by Sandwich's blatant hypocrisy in denouncing Wilkes in the House of Lords for his obscene *Essay on Women*.

Charles Churchill's emergence on the political scene of the 1760s as an outspoken, confident, and successful public satirist influenced by Pope skews the critical narrative which depicts eighteenth-century poetry as a movement from public to private, satire to lyric, urban to provincial. Like poets of a century earlier, Churchill participated in a vigorous paper war – this time, the campaign against John Stuart, Earl of Bute, who had succeeded the elder Pitt as first minister after the latter's resignation in 1761 on failing to win parliamentary support for declaring war on Spain. Bute's closeness to the new monarch, George III, and his suspected over-familiarity with the dowager Princess Augusta, gave rise to anti-Bute and anti-Scottish satire, much of which hinged on what lay under Scotsmen's kilts. The phallic jokes about Bute's monstrous sexual organs and Augusta's feigned coyness sexualized monarchical politics in a manner not witnessed since the reign of Charles II. Indeed, Churchill could have belonged to the century before his own. His scandalous reputation as a libertine, hard-drinking frequenter of the Hellfire Club, his early death (perhaps from venereal disease), and his visceral satires, unsparing of physical illness, recall the 1660s rather than the 1760s. The literary coterie to which he belonged – the "Nonsense Club," a group of Old Westminster schoolfriends including Bonnell Thornton, George Colman, William Cowper, and Robert Lloyd – recalls the dynamics of earlier urban literary côteries such as the Scriblerus Club of Pope, Swift, and Gay. Yet the Scriblerians – a conservative, witty elite pitted against the forces of low culture – were a far cry from Churchill's deliberate self-presentation as a poet of a demotic lower order, appealing to a "gen'rous PUBLIC." In the extraordinary body of work which he produced in the years 1763–4 – "The Prophecy of Famine," the "Epistle to Hogarth," "The Duellist," "Gotham," and "The Candidate" – the presence of Pope is everywhere felt in verbal echoes. Both satirists are bent on self-promotion, and both explore in their political satires the construction of a public self. Yet whereas Pope insists on defending his moral character, presenting his "best side" to the public, Churchill, with an almost louche frankness, exposes his own personal shortcomings, thereby authenticating his sincerity and lack of hypocrisy. In their length and digressiveness, Churchill's satires express a spontaneity at odds with Pope's concern with precision, revision, and "correctness." Whereas Pope feared anarchy, Churchill embraced the challenges anarchy posed to hypocrisy and political complacency. Yet to depict Churchill as Pope's polar opposite would be too simple: such oppositional distinctions do not fit his verse. Churchill's ironic satires are the product of a very different political climate from that which produced the satiric certainties of the Walpole years. Even "The Candidate" established two opposed poetic portraits of its satirical target – one of Sandwich's "virtuous" self, the other of the corruptly decadent "Lothario" – thereby introducing a complexity and relativism alien to satire. In poems such as "The Prophecy of Famine," Churchill has apparently a clear enough target – Bute in particular and Scots in general – yet even here his satiric mode is ill-suited to the

kind of head-on bipartisan conflict that characterized anti-Walpole satire. Instead, the poem plays with the multiple ironies attached to political slogans and labels such as "Patriot" and "Briton," with the Scottish Bute promoting himself in his newspaper *The Briton* and the English Wilkes producing a journal called *The North Briton*. As Lance Bertelsen observes, "Churchill captures rhetorically the essential ambiguity of reference and confusion of meaning that characterised the political and social theatre of the 1760s" (Bertelsen 1986: 179). Although Churchill represents a resurgence of political satire twenty years after its supposed "death," the relativistic, skeptical voice of his satires represents either a new direction for satire or possibly the implosion of the genre. Of such generic melting points are new directions forged: to catch echoes of Churchillian irony in Byron and Churchillian demotic urban anti-authoritarianism in Blake would not compromise his legacy.

See also chs. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"; 13, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Six Town Eclogues* and Other Poems"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 18, "Samuel Johnson, *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*"; 22, "Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*, and George Crabbe, *The Village*"; 27, "Verse Satire"; 28, "The Ode"; 29, "The Georgic"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics"; 33, "The Classical Inheritance"; 41, "Poetry Beyond the English Borders."

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2
Poetry, Politics, and Empire

Suvir Kaul

In 1715 Susannah Centlivre wrote a panegyric to the new monarch, George I, whose title indicates its occasional and public status: *A Poem. Humbly Presented to His most Sacred Majesty George, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland. Upon His Accession to the Throne.* At the end of the poem, Centlivre signs herself: "*I am with the profoundest Respect / Your Majesty's / Most Dutiful and / Most Devoted Subject*," a salutation that makes clear the connection between poetic practice and political persuasion. However, it is not only party affiliation that explains this panegyric; in writing such a poem Centlivre joined a great many of her fellow poets – Whigs, Tories, those without particular party identification – in a chorus of ritual celebration. Centlivre's poem is thus representative of the vast corpus of nationalist poetry written in this period, and allows us to note a great many of the formal, thematic, and rhetorical elements that are crucial to any enquiry into the links between poetry, politics, and empire in the long eighteenth century in England (and, post-1707, in Britain). To work through her poem is to list several of the commonplaces of English nationalism as they were debated and developed; the poem also allows us to assess the characteristically aggressive tone of divine certainty and worldly hope that becomes a staple of poems on "Great Britain" as that entity is forged at home and overseas.

Centlivre's poem begins by expressing the religious and political relief offered by a Protestant succession. The enthronement of George puts at rest any fears of Roman Catholic and Jacobite claims to the throne (fears that were to materialize into conflict the same year):

> Hail! Hero born to rule, and reconcile
> The fatal Discords of our *English* Isle!
> Our pure *Religion*, long the Mark of *Rome*,
> Repriev'd by You Escapes her final Doom.
> (ll. 11–14)

Second, Centlivre invokes that central token of "Britishness," the goddess Liberty, and, as is often the case in this period, represents her as under threat. (We should note that Liberty is an icon whose attributes are rarely defined, except as some generalized amalgam of the constitutional balance between Court and Parliament, the rule of law, "no-Popery," and the sturdy patriotic spirit that supposedly separated the Briton from Europeans and from peoples elsewhere in the world.)

> Unnumber'd Joys You to *Britannia* bring,
> And *Io Pæans* thro' the Nation ring.
> Delightful *Liberty*, with Fears half dead,
> Hears the glad Noise, and rears her pleasing Head;
> Her slacken'd Nerves their former Strength regain,
> And she her Life redates from George's Reign.
> (ll. 15–20)

Next, as part of an effort to smooth over any controversy about a non-English-speaking Hanoverian prince becoming the head of state, Centlivre lists a historical precedent particularly appropriate to the accession of George I, who had recently distinguished himself as an ally of the English against the French in the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13):

> So Cruel *Faction* tore *Rome's* ancient State,
> And all her Glories seem'd the Sport of Fate;
> When by Adoption *Trajan* took the Reins,
> And check'd his People's Heats, and quench'd the Flames;
> Enlarg'd her Bounds to distant *India's* Shoar,
> And taught her Drooping Eagles how to soar.
>
> You Sir, like him, the *British* Throne ascend;
> May equal Victories your Reign attend.
> (ll. 21–8)

Centlivre's invocation of Trajan, an "outsider" (he was not born in Italy) who became a Roman emperor (reigned 98–117), and whose imperial conquests expanded the boundaries of the Roman Empire "to distant *India's* shore," is part of the pattern of neoclassical, particularly Roman, cultural and political reference that gave structure to the cultural and ideological work of poets who wrote in English in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Not only was English poetry defined *vis-à-vis* the achievements of Latin poets, but crucial debates about the nature of the English polity – forms of governance and civic order at home, the commercial and agricultural priorities of the state and the nation both at home and overseas, territorial expansion abroad – were brought into focus by meditating on similar issues in the making (and the decline) of the Roman Empire. The "equal Victories" to which George I is invited to look forward extend beyond the borders of Europe and involve, as all intra-

European conflicts in the eighteenth century did, the acquisition or control of territories across the globe. Trajan's expansion of the Empire legitimized his claims to Rome, and Centlivre offers a similar imperial prospect to George I.

But the matter of Europe is not left out of this panegyric either. We are told of the mounting fears of European "tyrants" – in this period, usually the epithet of choice for enemy Roman Catholic monarchs, or, in a parallel context, for Muslim emperors:

> When round the Continent the Trump of Fame
> Did *Britain's* Glory in your Right proclaim,
> Tyrannick Monarchs, as with Thunder scar'd,
> Sent up their Prayers impending Fates to ward;
> (ll. 29–32)

George's power offers Belgium and Spain reassurance, and the prime European competitor France must learn its place:

> By your fam'd Justice, and your prudent Sway,
> *France* shall be taught to Love, or to Obey;
> Whilst You the Right of Liberty assert,
> And all the Ills of broken Faith avert;
> (ll. 35–8)

The rest of the poem contains a series of biblical, Christological, and genealogical allusions (to William of Orange and to Anne, as embodiments of the Protestant succession) all designed to suggest the importance of, and divine sanction for, the new monarch. The poem closes, as so many such poems do, in a halo of triumphalist prophecy:

> Hail great Deliverer, much lov'd Monarch Hail!
> No more shall *France*, no more shall *Rome* prevail:
> By Heav'ns Decree, You and your Issue stand
> Sure Signs of future Safety to this Land.
> So when th' Almighty caus'd the Flouds to cease,
> He fix'd his Bow in Token of the Peace.
> (ll. 61–6)

England as the Center of the World

Centlivre's Whiggish, Protestant and aggressively anti-French politics are well known, but the overt links between poetic practice, domestic politics, and the vision of empire that shape this poem are to be found in most poets who wrote in this period. John Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*, written in 1667 in partisan defense of Charles II against those who claimed the devastations of the plague and the Great Fire in London as

divine retribution for the King's misdeeds, ends with a vision of Augusta (London) as a "Maiden Queen" who beholds "From her High Turrets, hourly Sutors come: / The East with Incense, and the West with Gold, / Will stand, like Supplicants, to receive her doom" (ll. 1181–92). The poem promises British control of the oceans, and the last stanza interweaves commercial and edenic bliss:

> Thus to the Eastern wealth through storms we go;
> But now, the Cape once doubled, fear no more:
> A constant Trade-wind will securely blow,
> And gently lay us on the Spicy shore.
> (ll. 1213–16)

Similarly, Alexander Pope's paean of praise to Queen Anne and to English nationalism, *Windsor-Forest* (1713), incorporates an extended version of the vision of imperial ambition available in more muted terms in Centlivre's poem:

> Thy Trees, fair *Windsor*! now shall leave their Woods,
> And half thy Forests rush into my Floods,
> Bear *Britain's* Thunder, and her Cross display,
> To the bright Regions of the rising Day;
> Tempt Icy Seas, where scarce the Waters roll,
> Where clearer Flames glow round the frozen Pole;
> Or under Southern Skies exalt their Sails,
> Led by new Stars, and born by Spicy Gales!
> For me the Balm shall bleed, and Amber flow,
> The Coral redden, and the Ruby glow,
> The Pearly Shell its lucid Globe infold,
> And *Phoebus* warm the ripening Ore to Gold.
> The Time shall come, when free as Seas or Wind
> Unbounded *Thames* shall flow for all Mankind,
> Whole Nations enter with each swelling Tyde,
> And Seas but join the Regions they divide;
> Earth's distant Ends our Glory shall behold,
> And the new World launch forth to seek the Old.
> (ll. 385–402)

Dryden and Pope both develop at some length the idea that English advantages overseas will result from a mix of trading and naval–military prowess. In developing this claim, their poems powerfully fuse elements of contemporary historical observation with a near-utopian faith in the expansion of British power to other shores and territories. Crucially, domestic discord is seen to cease precisely because of opportunities created, and wealth derived, from global markets and commodities. Similarly, both Dryden and Pope write most persuasively on behalf of the domestic legitimacy of their respective monarchs because they develop elaborate accounts of the ways in

which, encouraged by royal patronage and policies, British naval prowess will result in great commercial and colonial success.

Key Terms: Patriotism, Liberty, Luxury, Progress

Bonamy Dobrée's survey of eighteenth-century poems featuring the rhetorical links between poetry, politics, and nationalism leads him to conclude that "There seems then to have been a definite need for the expression of the emotion [of patriotism], and we find the theme making its way into poems by a variety of doors, marked indifferently Liberty, Trade, Historic Sense or Vision of the Future, Peace, Public Works, Justice, or Pride in Literary Achievement" (Dobrée 1949: 52). He goes on to remark that "None of the other themes, the splendour of liberty, the glory of bygone days, the triumph of arms or arts, nor the enthronement of justice, can compare in volume, in depth, in vigour of expression, in width of imagination, with the full diapason of commerce" (p. 60). However, it is important to note that the celebration of British commerce is always part of a larger poetic project: the projection of English "civilization," particularly as manifested in its poetry and culture, as more benevolent and humane – more advanced – than that of its European competitors or particularly those of non-European peoples. Poets thus began to develop quasi-anthropological, quasi-historical comparative techniques in their poems, where their surveys of the past and present allowed them to claim Britain and Britons as the latest, and most worthy, beneficiaries of the historical rise (and fall) of empires. The medieval model of the movement of culture (*translatio studii*) was mapped onto the idea that empires followed a westward drift (*translatio imperii*); thus both the British Muse and the British Empire (however limited, or under threat, this empire might have been in practice) were seen to be the latest and most legitimate inheritors of the achievements of classical and early modern European empires – but with one important difference: the British commitment to Liberty was meant to protect its society and people from the seemingly inevitable decline into the "Luxury," degeneracy, and effeminacy that had destroyed otherwise manly and martial empires like those of Sparta and Rome. It was the job of poets both to join in a massed chorus that sang of the virtues of a nation peaceful at home and powerful abroad, and to act as guardians of the social fabric of the nation by intervening in public debates and by warning against political–economic and moral failures.

Poets thus emphasized their ethical claims to comment on weighty public matters, and sought, in their contribution to public discussion, to assure for themselves a vocational importance. They became denominators of "Progress" – of Poesy, of the Muses, of Scientific and Technological developments, of Commerce, of Empire – and a great many of them contributed to Whiggish notions of the growing political and cultural power of Britain. Few poets were simply propagandists of trade or of empire; they wrote poetry because its vocabulary of inspiration and aspiration, movement and transport, musicality and sublimity allowed them explorations of personal and

communal experience and feeling. But it is certain that the subject matter of nation and of state, of commercial glory and imperial power, encouraged an identification between poet and nation and between poetry and cultural nationalism. To take only one example of the kind of formal experimentation that resulted, the Pindaric ode was written once again as the rhapsodic form most capable of enabling the transports of the nationalist imagination. Edward Young, for instance, had no hesitation in stating in a prose treatise, "On Lyric Poetry," that he wrote odes for precisely that reason: "The ancients generally had a particular regard to the choice of their subjects, which were generally national and great. My subject is, in its own nature, noble; most proper for an Englishman; never more proper than on this occasion; and (what is strange) hitherto unsung." (Young's treatise accompanied his *Ocean: An Ode* [1728], whose subtitle makes clear his sense of the propriety of occasion and subject: *Occasioned by His Majesty's Royal Encouragement of the Sea Service. To which is Prefixed an Ode to the King; and a Discourse on Ode.*) Young begins his ode by asking: "Who sings the source / Of wealth and force? / Vast field of commerce, and big war!" (ll. 13–15), and, hearing of no other celebrants of Ocean, rushes in himself: "What! none aspire? / I snatch the lyre, / And plunge into the foaming wave" (ll. 22–4). For him, the overlap between poetic theme and achievement is clear and mutually reinforcing:

> The main! the main!
> Is Britain's reign;
> Her strength, her glory, is her fleet:
> The main! the main!
> Be Britain's strain;
> As Tritons strong, as Syrens sweet.
> (ll. 43–8)

Other poets glorify the Thames as the national river that allows easy access to the global flows of the oceans, and thus to all the commodities and territories that lie within reach, particularly as British shipbuilding technologies and seafaring techniques improve. Over the course of this century, the control of shipping lanes became a crucial priority for British foreign policy, and, equally, British prowess on the oceans became central to the mythology of the nation. Naval warfare in distant waters, as well as the dissemination of travelogs and news reports of ocean voyages to faraway lands, encouraged a new global awareness, even a new internationalism. The oceans were represented as the new medium for the exchanges upon which British prosperity and authority were based, with the goods of the world flowing in, and British civic "enlightenment" flowing out. Poets were glad to invoke the dense, ideologically potent memories of the Homeric highways of the seas in their own tributes to British seafaring; no English epic was written in the eighteenth century, but the most expansive poems are those that contain in themselves accounts of the world enabled by longer and longer voyages, culminating with those of Captain James Cook to the islands of the South Pacific. The oceans could be terrifying in their boundlessness, and

in the destructive unpredictability of their storms; but, as James Thomson's anthem "Rule, Britannia!" put it, they were also the "azure main" out of which Britain arose, and over which Britons were granted control:

When Britain first, at Heaven's command,
Arose from out the azure main,
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sung this strain –
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never will be slaves."
(ll. 1–6)

Nationalist Doubt and Poetic Ambivalence

Most poems on such themes – liberty, warfare, trade, empire, state power, naval strength, commercial or even agricultural development – are not uncomplicated exercises in self- and national aggrandizement or uncritical celebrations of "progress." Even when the poems seem assured about the necessity of British expansionism, they are not consistently certain about that (inter)national project, and have to work hard to construct compelling arguments and iconographies that naturalize the assumptions and view of the world that define modern empires. In fact, it is arguable that the characteristic idiom of even panegyrics to national power is that of ambivalence, anxiety, and doubt, and that the dynamic, forward-looking, often utopian movement of such poems results both from the articulation of such anxieties and, crucially, from the performance of a poetic and imaginative recovery from fears about the state of the nation. Thus, many poems begin with a sense of the embattled nation (the "fatal discords" or weakened Liberty of which Centlivre writes), or of particular national constituencies or policies under siege, and then go on to show how such difficulties can be surmounted or transformed into opportunities that will ensure a glorious future. History – the record of prior or competing European nations and empires, or even of the British isles – is mined to show how providential portents and more worldly historical events point to the elevation of Britain to international dominance. However, the recourse to such comparative historical study is double-edged, if only because it inevitably suggests the many material and moral factors that contribute to national decline. To what political, economic or socio-cultural practices, for instance, could the decline of the Roman Empire be attributed, and how could an English culture that genuflected before its literary, historiographical, artistic, architectural, and imperial successes insulate itself from similar degeneration? How could it best avoid following the more recent fate of the Spanish Empire, given that in 1713 Britain wrested from the Spanish sole control of the Atlantic slave trade and thus positioned itself as the direct successor to Spanish power in the Caribbean and the Americas?

Britain might see itself as the contemporary beneficiary of the westward movement of empire, but as early as 1726 George Berkeley could write, in his "On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America," that all of Europe was decaying and that the Muse of empire would now move across the Atlantic:

> Westward the course of empire takes its way;
> The four first acts already past,
> A fifth shall close the drama with the day;
> Time's noblest offspring is the last.
> (ll. 21–4)

Very early in the next century, Anna Laetitia Barbauld was to incur critical condemnation when she wrote "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven," a poem weary of the protracted wars that England had fought in Europe and elsewhere, and depressed about the impact of such continual military mobilization on trade and indeed on life at home. The "golden tide of Commerce" flows elsewhere, she wrote, and leaves in its wake "enfeebling Luxury and ghastly Want" (ll. 61–6). British cultural and technological authority declines, and the prospect of national ruin looms:

> Night, Gothic night, again may shade the plains
> Where Power is seated, and where Science reigns;
> England, the seat of arts, be only known
> By the grey ruin and the moldering stone;
> That Time may tear the garland from her brow,
> And Europe sit in dust, as Asia now.
> (ll. 121–6)

For Barbauld, as for many other poets in the eighteenth century, the bright dream of empire was constantly threatened by the nightmare of its dissolution. It is also the case, of course, that defeats – significant losses in naval and territorial battles, the loss of control over trading outposts and colonies – were a recurrent feature of British life, and a constant reminder not only that empire extracted its costs, in terms of compromised political ethics and corruption, and the expenditure of men and materials, but that its boundaries were constantly contested, both by European powers and by subject populations.

Not all policy planners or poets reveled in dreams of empire, of course. Several critics, including most recently Brean Hammond and Christine Gerrard, have detailed the political and partisan affiliations that motivated poets to espouse differing positions on public issues (including, of course, those that produced the spate of satires which gave literary culture in the early decades of the eighteenth century its characteristic energy and bite). Some poets argued vociferously against Britain's development of its overseas commerce: the wealth that resulted, they believed, accrued to urban constituencies unmindful of the age-old agricultural and rural basis of the English

economy and society. Oliver Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* has Lien Chi Altangi, his Chinese observer of European and British mores, note in Letter 25 that

> extending empire is often diminishing power, that countries are ever strongest which are internally powerful; that colonies by draining away the brave and the enterprising, leave the country in the hands of the timid and the avaricious; ... that too much commerce may injure a nation as much as too little; that there is a wide difference between a conquering and a flourishing empire.

Goldsmith's best-known poem, *The Deserted Village* (1770), derives from his concern that those who made enormous fortunes overseas, or even while trading and banking in London, were directly responsible for rural dispossession and depopulation, in that they enclosed lands and developed estates that destroyed local subsistence economies and pauperized sharecroppers. While this may not have been the sole cause – the development of farming machinery and agricultural techniques encouraged capital-intensive farming on large farms, which was another incentive to consolidate holdings – Goldsmith made clear his feelings about the state of the nation (and its empire) in *The Traveller, or a Prospect of Society* (1764):

> Laws grind the poor and rich men rule the law;
> The wealth of climes, where savage nations roam,
> Pillaged from slaves to purchase slaves at home;
> ...
> Have we not seen, round Britain's peopled shore,
> Her useful sons exchanged for useless ore?
> Seen all her triumphs but destruction haste,
> Like flaring tapers brightening as they waste;
> Seen opulence, her grandeur to maintain,
> Lead stern depopulation in her train,
> And over fields where scattered hamlets rose,
> In barren solitary pomp repose?
> Have we not seen at pleasure's lordly call,
> The smiling long-frequented village fall?
> (ll. 386–406)

When Samuel Johnson supplied the last four lines of *The Deserted Village*, he emphasized Goldsmith's political concern about the deleterious domestic impact of overseas trading and empire:

> Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain;
> Teach him that states of native strength possessed,
> Though very poor, may still be very blest;
> That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,
> As ocean sweeps the laboured mole away;

While self-dependent power can time defy,
As rocks resist the billows and the sky.
(ll. 424–30)

Johnson's closing image, in which the ocean destroys that which has been built up laboriously over time, reverses the poetic convention, exemplified by Edward Young's usage above, in which the oceans are seen to be the natural source of British greatness.

The Poet as Surveyor – of Britain and the Globe

In general, James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1725–30, and subsequently revised) might well be the best single poem in which to chart the broad themes of, and eccentric overlaps between, the eighteenth-century nationalist and imperial imaginaries. Long, and encyclopedic in scope, the poem is a repository of a great many of the local and global observations and comparative meditations that define the poetic exploration of nation and empire. To take one instance, critics have pointed to the fact that Thomson, like most educated people, was familiar with many travelogs, and such writing feeds his description of major rivers in Egypt, other parts of Africa, India, Thailand, and the Americas, all of which grant an effortless fecundity and an "untoiling harvest" to those who live on their banks ("Summer," l. 831). This observation functions as the prelude to a comparative survey of symbols of national wealth (and the kinds of social and ethical mores they encourage), in which Chinese silk, Indian diamond mines, Andean silver mines, African ivory and wood are pitted against all that makes Britain special:

the softening arts of peace,
Whate'er the humanizing Muses teach,
The godlike wisdom of the tempered breast,
Progressive truth, the patient force of thought,
Investigation calm whose silent powers
Command the world, the light that leads to Heaven,
Kind equal rule, the government of laws,
And all-protecting freedom which alone
Sustains the name and dignity of man –
These are not theirs.
(ll. 875–84)

Britain's civic and "civilizational" blessings – it is home to "the saving Virtues" of Peace, "social Love," Charity, "Undaunted Truth, and dignity of mind," Courage, "sound temperance," "clear Chastity," "Rough Industry; Activity untired," and "Public Zeal" – are the products of its temperate weather, its rural, agrarian strengths, and its mercantile prowess. The poem elaborates on these themes repeatedly, and at length. No matter that Thomson, over the course of the poem, also elaborates a wide variety

of historical and contemporary ills that beset Britain; the kernel of the poem's celebration of Britain is its affirmation of the island nation, its impregnable separateness and its ability to project its military might across the oceans:

> Island of bliss! amid the subject seas
> That thunder round thy rocky coasts, set up,
> At once the wonder, terror, and delight,
> Of distant nations, whose remotest shore
> Can soon be shaken by thy naval arm;
> Not to be shook thyself, but all assaults
> Baffling, like thy hoar cliffs the loud sea-wave.
> (ll. 1595–1601)

In this passage Thomson continues a long tradition of nationalist self-representation (we can think of John of Gaunt's lyrical lines in Shakespeare's *Richard II*: "this little world, / This precious stone set in the silver sea, / Which serves it in the office of a wall, … This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England": II. i. 45–50), but renders the whole more belligerent, more certain that the providential gift of the surrounding waters is not an encouragement to defensiveness or insularity alone, but to a more self-assured projection of national power overseas.

In this account so far we have traced poetic trends that feature poets as critics or propagandists of empire, and as commentators on political and economic policies that have a bearing on the commercial and colonial practices of the nation. Often, its cultural cachet, and its epic and inspirational capacities, encouraged writers to turn to poetry, rather than to prose, when they wished to explore ideas that would lead them across the length and breadth of the British Isles, or when they wished to consider or enact the uneven relation between the Celtic cultures of Scotland and Ireland and that of England, as James Macpherson did when he forged a cultural prehistory for Britain in his Ossianic "translations." In each case, poets played a consequential role – greater than that played by novelists or, after 1700, by playwrights – in forging the mythology and iconography of nationalism. For instance, when the Welshman John Dyer wished to highlight an industry that he thought most important for the socio-economic well-being of Britain, he wrote *The Fleece* (1757), in which the rearing of sheep and the wool trade are considered fit subjects for a national georgic. Indeed, the poem performs one function that we associate with the epic, which is that its account of sheep-rearing, shearing, wool-making and weaving in different parts of the country becomes a knitting together of different subnational communities of shepherds, lathe- and loom-makers, dyers, weavers, and consumers into the fabric of nation ("Various professions in the work unite: / For each on each depends," iii. 119–20). In order to show just how important the entire sociology and economy of the wool trade is, Dyer's poem contains meditations on the civic values, the technology, and the mercantile practices that allow for widespread domestic and overseas consumption. In doing so, he elevates sheep and their fleece into a viable symbol of cooperative national achievement. His poem thus has a collective subject – Britons

who learn the "wide felicities of labour" (i. 9) and, in doing so, confirm that sheep are in fact Britain's natural wealth:

> Hail, noble Albion; where no golden mines,
> No soft perfumes, nor oils, nor myrtle bowers,
> The vigorous frame and lofty heart of man
> Enervate.
> . . .
> See the sun gleams; the living pastures rise,
> After the nurture of the fallen shower,
> How beautiful! how blue th' ethereal vault,
> How verdurous the lawns, how clear the brooks!
> Such noble warlike steeds, such herds of kine,
> So sleek, so vast; such spacious flocks of sheep,
> Like flakes of gold illuminating the green,
> What other Paradise adorn but thine,
> Britannia?
>
> (i. 152–71)

Dyer remarks in line 152 on the absence of gold mines in Britain, but then, in the kind of alchemical sublimation poetry makes possible, finds in the "spacious flocks of sheep" the "flakes of gold" that make Albion a paradise. At this moment, as in so many others in this long poem, Dyer produces images and longer accounts of national singularity and blessedness that all go towards the creation of what David Shields has called the poem's "theology of trade" (Shields 1990: 65). As this brief account suggests, however, it is not only a providentialist poetics, but a longer, more considered historical and geographical survey of global commodities and of British economy and society that shapes *The Fleece* and structures its vision of all nations joined by British trade:

> Rejoice, ye nations, vindicate the sway
> Ordain'd for common happiness. Wide, o'er
> The globe terraqueous, let Britannia pour
> The fruits of plenty from her copious horn.
>
> (iv. 654–7)

Poetry and Slavery

If *The Fleece* creates a georgic map (as it were) of Britain by linking disparate regions and populations into relations of economic and social cooperation that spread, web-like, across the oceans, another variety of georgic situated itself in faraway colonies whose economic productivity was equally crucial to the health of the empire. The Scotsman James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* (1764) is the most ambitious of such

eighteenth-century poems. As John Gilmore, its most recent editor, reminds us, this poem stems from Grainger's belief that "the cultivation of the sugar-cane is not a matter of growing some rather peculiar plant in a few small islands a long way from anywhere important, but the basis of a prosperous trading system which spans the Atlantic" (Gilmore 2000: 31). Grainger treats the natural beauties of a Caribbean plantation as he does the fecundity of the soil or the enforced productivity of slaves – each plays a role in enabling "Mighty commerce" to

> throw
> O'er far-divided nature's realms, a chain
> To bind in sweet society mankind.
> By thee white Albion, once a barbarous clime,
> Grew fam'd for arms, for wisdom, and for laws;
> By thee she holds the balance of the world,
> Acknowledg'd now sole empress of the main.
> (iv. 350–6)

Grainger's "West-India georgic" raises plantation practices, including the management of slaves and their illnesses, to the status of classical poetic subjects, extending to the British colonies of the Caribbean the same literary courtesy Dyer bestowed on the sheep-rearing provinces of Britain. Not unexpectedly, Grainger has few qualms about slave labor (which, he argues, is less arduous than work in the mines of Scotland, where the laborers were still serfs, or the Inca empire) and is quite certain that slaves should be satisfied with their circumstances:

> With these compar'd, ye sons of Afric, say,
> How far more happy is your lot? Bland health,
> Of ardent eye, and limb robust, attends
> Your custom'd labour; and, should sickness seize,
> With what solicitude are ye not nurs'd! –
> Ye Negroes, then, your pleasing task pursue;
> And, by your toil, deserve your master's care.
> (iv. 199–205)

Virgil's *Georgics* had also taken for granted a slave economy; but there is nothing in that poem that provides a precedent for Grainger's rewriting of the brutalities of plantation slavery into this banal exhortation to slaves to pursue their "pleasing task." If readers today need any reminder of the ideological priorities of British nationalist and imperialist thought in the practice of eighteenth-century poetry, Grainger's georgic is salutary reading.

However, the power of poetry to move or to anger, to naturalize or to alienate, to justify or to contest, is even more compellingly put to service later in the century by the movement for the abolition of the slave trade. The anonymous author of *Jamaica, a Poem: In Three Parts* (1777) prefaced his poem with a pointed rebuttal of Grainger:

"The Muse thinks it disgraceful in a Briton to sing of the Sugar-cane, since to it is owing the Slavery of the Negroes" (Krise 1999: 328). He provides enough details of plantation practices to remind his readers that slaves do rebel in the face of great cruelties (Jamaica had in fact seen a slave revolt in 1760, and the years continued to be tense):

> And can the Muse reflect her tear-stained eye,
> When blood attests ev'n slaves for freedom die?
> On cruel gibbets high disclos'd they rest,
> And scarce one groan escapes one bloated breast.
> . . .
> Britons, forbear! be Mercy still your aim,
> And as your faith, unspotted be your fame;
> Tremendous pains tremendous deeds inspire,
> And, hydra-like, new martyrs rise from fire.
> (iii. 57–68)

Unlike this poet, who spoke as a Jamaican himself, or at least as someone who had lived and worked there, most anti-slavery poets did not in fact know slavery at first hand, but found in the issue an emotive and moral power that moved them to write. Their productivity was such that the corpus of anti-slavery poetry is important for any literary-historical consideration of poetry, politics, and empire in the later eighteenth century.

Given the status of poetry as the literary form most conducive to the expression of higher ethical and humanitarian values, as also for the elaboration of issues important to the nation, it seemed entirely appropriate for anti-slavery activists to augment their pamphleteering and parliamentary lobbying by writing poems in the service of their cause. Several women were prominent in this effort, including Hannah More, Elizabeth Bentley, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld; their poems argued both that slavery was inhuman and anti-Christian, and that if Britain was to claim its empire as legitimate and in the service of social and cultural improvement of all its subjects, it needed to rid itself of the taint of slave-trading and slave-owning (though the latter claim was not made forcefully till the nineteenth century). The anti-slavery discourse in poetry, that is, claimed both the ethical and the nationalist high ground: abolition would be the best demonstration of the civic superiority of British values, and thus a potent reminder of why the British Empire was at heart humane and civilizing rather than brutal and exploitative. The world of slavery, but also the world more generally, is represented as in need of British reform (indeed, particular constituencies in Britain are represented as in need of reform). This argument derived some intellectual force from the dissemination of the "four-stages theory" of human development – from hunting and gathering to pastoralism to agriculture to commerce – which led to explanations of the socio-cultural superiority of Europeans over the rest of the world (lagging behind in terms of development) and thus to the claim that British

leadership would allow primitive nations and peoples to emerge from economic and religious darkness. Certainly the Declaration of Independence by the thirteen United States colonies in 1776 had dented claims for the moral and political legitimacy of the British Empire; as British abolitionists sought to generalize the vocabulary of natural rights and freedom into arenas where they had hitherto been considered inapplicable, they also restored some of the lost sheen of the *Pax Britannica*. Perhaps the final word on this topic should be given to Hannah More, who closes her poem on "The Black Slave Trade" (1787) with a vignette of Britain as no longer an enslaving but an emancipatory global power, and thus as restored to its primacy among all nations:

> The dusky myriads crowd the sultry plain,
> And hail that mercy long invok'd in vain,
> Victorious pow'r! she bursts their two-fold bands,
> And faith and freedom springs from Britain's hands.
> (ll. 346–9)

See also chs. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 29, "The Georgic"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics"; 38, "Poetry and the City"; 39, "Cartography and the Poetry of Place."

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3
Poetry and Science

Clark Lawlor

Our whole theory of life has long been influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by the general conception of the universe which has been forced upon us by physical science.

Thomas Huxley, *Science and Culture*, 1880, 132–3

What am I? how produc'd? and for what End?
Whence drew I Being? to what Period tend?
Am I th' abandon'd Orphan of blind Chance:
Dropt by wild Atoms, in disorder'd Dance?
Or from an endless Chain of Causes wrought,
And of unthinking Substance, born with Thought?
By Motion which began without a Cause . . .
Am I but what I seem, mere Flesh and Blood;
A branching Channel, with a mazy Flood?

John Arbuthnot,
Know Yourself [*Gnothi seauton*], 1734

Science, according to Huxley, is not separate from the rest of culture. The reluctant tone introduced by the word "forced" also indicates the doubts that have beset the advances of science in the centuries since Huxley's. No one has been immune – how could they be? – from the technology that science has brought to bear on our everyday lives. But the "force" of science operates on at least two, interrelated, levels. The first is that of the technology it brings into being. At the end of the eighteenth century, people's lives were more and more dominated by what we loosely describe as the industrial revolution; even at the beginning of our period new technologies were beginning to affect (to take a profound example) chronometry. New types of clocks and watches reconstructed the sense of time and narrative, as Stuart Sherman (1996) has argued. The second level of scientific influence is that of "world-view": our philosophical and even practical sense of what it means to be human. The "New Science" of

the previous century, which stressed the role of the human body as a machine and the universe as a great watch mechanism, encouraged or even forced eighteenth-century poets and writers, such as Dr. John Arbuthnot, to contemplate deeply their place in the great scheme of things or "Chain of Being."

Famously, Arbuthnot was at the same time physician to Queen Anne, Fellow of the Royal Society, and a member of the Scriblerus Club, friend to Pope and Swift, Gay and Parnell. In an age where there was no great separation between poet and scientist, Arbuthnot chose to express his doubts and fears about the brave new universe in the best medium then available: poetry. He is better known to us through his collaborative satires, such as *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* (1741) – which, ironically, were often directed at the Royal Society of which he was a member – but in the passage quoted above his moral philosophizing is clearly attempting to answer the questions posed by the materialistic implications of science. The mechanistic and Godless universe of a Descartes or even (potentially) a Newton or Harvey in England had apparently reduced man to a random, Lucretian assortment of atoms, thrown together by a blind Nature. Both the microcosm of the body and the macrocosm of the planets and suns were without ultimate meaning – mere machines. As we shall see later, these troubling questions did have religious answers that bypassed the fundamental problems of scientific secularization for the moment; but Arbuthnot's opening to the suggestively titled *Know Yourself* illustrates Huxley's broad assertion – and my specific argument in this essay – that science fundamentally altered the world-view of the literate part of eighteenth-century culture and, later, that of the illiterate also. Such a transformation in the cultural imaginary ultimately affected and inspired all poets in the period, although some more directly and topically than others.

Definitions

How exactly did the eighteenth-century person define "science"? In the broadest sense, "science" simply meant organized knowledge. As late as 1799 Anna Laetitia Barbauld began her poem "To Mr Coleridge" by talking about the difficulties of ascending "the hill of science" (Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 484). This was not, as we might nowadays assume, a complaint about her problems in understanding Newtonian mathematics and gravitational theory, but a warning about obstacles, such as a Thomsonian "*Indolence*," to a broader education that would assist both moral and poetic development. In this definition Barbauld, a former student of the great chemist Joseph Priestley at the Warrington Academy, echoed Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary*. Nevertheless, it was clear that the Aristotelian categories of "natural philosophy" (the scientific study of nature, as we would term it) and "natural history" (the mere observation of natural phenomena; a collection of facts rather than a deeper study of causes of those natural phenomena) were together a "ferment of knowledge" that was becoming more recognizable as modern, experimental science.

Similarly, the meaning of the word "literature" was much broader in this period of polymorphously perverse knowledge production. In a recent eight-volume anthology of eighteenth-century literary and scientific texts, several of the editors have questioned whether eighteenth-century writers saw any difference between works of literature and of science: all were "literature" to them. Michael Newton contends – radically – that "distinctions between the 'literary' and the scientific are not tenable" (Kramer et al. 2003: 372), while Richard Hamblyn notes "the fruitful interdependence of the scientific and the literary in this period" and shows that it is often difficult to identify writing as literature or natural philosophy (Hamblyn 2003: xxiv).

Physico-Theology and the New Science

Although today many think of science as a force that stands in total opposition to religion, the response of the eighteenth century – scientist and layperson alike – to the relation between the two was not as fraught as one might think. Certainly, as we have seen with Arbuthnot's initial ponderings, the new world-view posed problems; but in Britain the broad consensus saw science synthesized into an older religious discourse that gained new life via the discoveries of Newton and his ilk. The result of this combination was known as the "argument by design," or the idea that God manifested himself as the glorious creator through his sublime work of Nature, and that the mission of the scientist was to glorify God by revealing the complexity and magnificence of Nature to the rest of society. In this version of science, to be a scientist was to be pious: the New Science was actually providing proof of God's existence to those who might have any doubts at all. "Physico-theology" – as William Derham termed it – served to legitimate what might otherwise have been seen as an atheistic, secularizing mode of knowledge. Titles of works like the influential naturalist John Ray's *Wisdom of God as Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1691) announce their subordination of science to religion.

The source of physico-theology lay in the New Science of the previous two centuries. In the late sixteenth century the medieval world-view was undergoing a transformation: Galileo and Kepler consolidated the Copernican revolution in which it was shown that the earth was not the centre of the universe and that it in fact revolved around the sun, in opposition to the older Ptolemaic model. Francis Bacon's emphasis on the knowledge of nature through experimentation rather than untested hypotheses or unquestioning acceptance of the ancients' writings provided the methodology of modern science. Bacon's idea that knowledge needed to be shared because no single person could comprehend Nature's vastness led to the creation of the Royal Society of London for the Promotion of Natural Knowledge in 1662. Poets such as John Dryden and Abraham Cowley moved in the same circles as the members of the society – Cowley (1618–67) himself was medically qualified and a keen botanist – and were fully capable of expressing their sense of scientific modernity in verse, as indeed had many others, including John Donne and John Milton.

Newton

Alexander Pope, the greatest poet of the century, had this to say on the subject of scientific Enlightenment:

> Nature, and Nature's Laws lay hid in Night:
> God said, *Let Newton be!* And All was *Light*.
> ("Epitaph. Intended for Sir Isaac
> Newton, In Westminster Abbey," 1730)

The tribute of one genius to another, Pope's couplet brilliantly encapsulates the effect that science, in the person of the iconic Newton, had on his century. New Science offered Enlightenment indeed. Crucially, however, Pope's epigram places Newton under the fiat of God, and this is where Newton was to stay in our period: science, poetry, and religion usually were to be partners rather than enemies.

Newton may not have been the only genius behind the New Science, nor indeed was he its only icon; but he certainly was its most important figure, and even more so after his death in 1727. Newton's influence was far-reaching in many ways throughout the century, not least in poetry. On one direct level, he inspired a great deal of panegyric poetry, such as James Thomson's "A Poem Sacred to the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton" (1727); on another, he was constantly mentioned in different kinds of poem and for different aspects of his work. The *Principia* (1687) used mathematics to explain both gravity and the way it acted on the planets and comets. Through this work Newton showed that the universe was orderly and that even apparently irregular phenomena such as comets behaved according to known laws. Newton gave a new and welcome impetus to an idea that poets and divines already believed. An anonymous contribution to the *London Medley* (1731) gives us some idea of what the man or woman in the street made of Newton's theories:

> Newton arose; shew'd how each planet moved . . .
> He was the first that could unerring trace
> Each orbit thro' th'immense expanded space:
> He was the first that with unweary'd flight,
> Fathom'd the depth of heav'n, and reach'd the height,
> Where comets thro' the void revolving flow,
> Their course oblique and settled period know;
> Guided by him when we survey the whole,
> Worlds beyond worlds that by him measur'd roll,
> And with the vast idea fill the soul;
> What is the point of earth, this mortal seat,
> How little all appears, and He how great!
> (quoted in Jones 1966: 99)

As with most of the poets responding to Newton and the New Science, the inevitable caveat is that even a genius cannot explain the secret cause behind the astounding mechanics of the universe. As Mary Leapor asserted in "The Enquiry": "Not *Newton's* Art can show / A Truth, perhaps, not fit for us to know" (ll. 19–20, in Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 289). Although most of her poem is an excited reworking of Pope's and Addison's own responses to the new universe opened up by Newtonian theory, Leapor is careful, as were the English scientists, to preserve God as the first cause of all creation.

The second facet of Newton's influence came via his *Opticks* (1704), in which he demonstrated the behavior and content of light, especially through the prism's power to split light into its constituent rainbow colors. Poetic metaphor traditionally figured God as the light of the world: Newton seemed to be confirming his unifying power while at the same time enhancing poetic appreciation of light's harmonious beauty. James Thomson described a rainbow specifically in Newtonian terms in his *Seasons*:

> Here, awful NEWTON, the dissolving Clouds
> Form, fronting on the Sun, thy showery Prism;
> And to the sage-instructed Eye unfold
> The various twine of light, by thee disclos'd
> From the white mingling Maze.
> ("Spring," ll. 208–12,
> in Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 199)

William Powell Jones has argued that Marjorie Hope Nicolson's study on the effect of Newton's work, *Newton Demands the Muse*, overemphasized the importance of the *Opticks* at the expense of the *Principia* (Jones 1966: 97). This is true to a certain extent, but Newton's explorations in the world of sight were nevertheless influential in eighteenth-century poetry, with the major poets of the age routinely using his terminology. Even Pope's apparently unscientific *Rape of the Lock* uses Newton's imagery of diffraction in the description of the sylphs, who are "Dipt in the richest tincture of the skies, / Where light disports in ever-mingling dies" (ii. 65–6, in Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 119).

Thomson's *Seasons*, although not primarily scientific in theme, is a poem of physico-theology that places nature as God's book: a physical universe that can be better exemplified by the judicious use of scientific language and metaphor. Douglas Bush's dated and negative account of eighteenth-century poetry and science laments the loss of the older sources of imagery such as alchemy, astrology, bestiaries, the symbolic use of classical myth, the emblematic and religious conception of nature, and generally what he perceives as a rich tradition sacrificed to scientific modernity. By contrast, William Powell Jones's and Marjorie Hope Nicolson's various studies show the infusion of powerful metaphors and images from the New Science, a poetic revolution that reflected the birth of the modern scientific world-view but also a new way of glorifying God and describing the entire universe in both micro- and macrocosm.

The Great Chain of Being and Technology

What kinds of scientific sources inspired the poets' images and narratives? Two primary and complementary developments in technology were the microscope and the telescope; both instruments led science into science fiction. The telescope had revealed an apparently infinite universe – in contrast to the bounded Ptolemaic system centered on the earth – and it seemed further planets and suns were being discovered almost daily. This new space for the imagination was enthusiastically explored by poets and writers: voyages to the moon and soaring trips to the stars were the fodder of science fiction, while it also appeared likely that planets would be inhabited by other beings, as Mary Leapor wondered of the Moon: "What kind of People on her Surface dwell?" ("The Enquiry," l. 18). Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–5) ecstatically combined the praise of astronomy and "The mathematic glories of the skies" with the newly developing mode of the sublime:

O for a telescope His throne to reach!
Tell me, ye learn'd on earth! Or blest above!
Ye searching, ye Newtonian, Angels! Tell
Where, your great Master's orb? His planets where?
(Young 1774: vol. 4, ix. 1080, 1834–7)

Microscopes, meanwhile, had revealed previously unimagined new worlds in even a drop of water. The Great Chain of Being so beloved of poets in previous eras was now spectacularly reconfigured to include microscopic organisms, as James Thomson's manuscript additions to "Summer" illustrate:

Downward from these what numerous kinds descend,
Evading even the microscopic eye!
Full nature swarms with life; one wondrous [*heap*] mass
Of animals, or atoms organiz'd,
Waiting the vital breath, when Parent-Heaven
Shall bid his spirit blow . . .
The flowery leaf
Wants not it's soft inhabitants. Secure,
Within it's winding citadel, the stone
Holds multitudes . . .
Where the pool
Stands mantled o'er with green, invisible,
Amid the floating verdure millions stray.
(quoted in Jones 1996: 111)

Such images did provoke anxiety, but were contained within a religious framework best expressed by Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* which, like Arbuthnot's *Know Thyself*, reflects on man's place in the Newtonian universe and, like other writers,

subjects science to religion. The leaps in scale up and down the Chain of Being become part of God's "mighty maze, but not without a plan" (1. 6): a plan that Newton had helped to reveal. Animate nature stretches from God to

> Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,
> Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,
> No glass can reach; from infinite to thee;
> From thee to nothing.
> (ll. 238–41)

Pope's poem is typical of the physico-theological approach in that – despite its being freighted with Newtonian terminology and ideas – he feels compelled to point out the limits of science. Man might follow "where science guides," but "superior beings" will see Newton as a circus act or freak:

> Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides;
> Instruct the planets in what orbs to run,
> Correct old time, and regulate the sun . . .
> Superior beings, when of late they saw
> A mortal man unfold all Nature's law,
> Admir'd such wisdom in an earthly shape,
> And show'd a Newton as we show an ape.
> (ii. 19–21, 31–4)

Newton, the man who has revealed Nature's laws, is the best of puny mankind, himself the paradox of creation or "The glory, jest and riddle of the world" (ii. 18). Although his "rules the rapid comet bind," the great scientist cannot "Explain his own beginning or his end" (ii. 35–8).

Consuming Science

Science was not only revelatory for philosophically inclined male poets; it was indicative of progress for all. Addison's influential essays on the Imagination in *The Spectator* were one channel through which a broad journal audience received information. Many writers were quick to use poetry as a medium to disseminate Newtonian ideas to the general public, naturally assuming that the exciting new developments in so many areas of knowledge would be of interest to more than an educated elite. Science was also in vogue by the mid-eighteenth century, a fashion to be worn on one's sleeve in polite society. Prolific authors like Benjamin Martin – who published at least forty works for ladies and children as well as gentlemen – were able to state by 1743 that science had become so fashionable that "to cultivate this study, is only to be in taste, and politeness is an inseparable consequence" (Preface to *A Course of Lectures in Natural and Experimental Philosophy, Geography and Astronomy*, p. 2). As Cheryce Kramer has

put it in her introduction to *Science as Polite Culture*, "Air pumps, galvanic piles and pendulum experiments were the stuff of refined soirees amongst privileged members of society. They were to be consumed, like truffles and oranges, as the tokens of a luxurious existence" (Kramer et al. 2003: xxxiii). Martin also felt able to make the claim that great poets from the time of the ancients had taken inspiration from natural philosophy in mutually sublime interaction (1743: preface, 4–5).

Popularizers of science like John Desaguliers, whose poem "The Newtonian System of the World, the Best Model of Government" (1728) had the sanction of Newton himself, swarmed to provide the information craved by the public (Kramer et al. 2003: 63). An exciting lecturer, Desaguliers was fêted by all parts of society for his willingness to dramatize science in practical demonstrations. His poem celebrated the accession of George II to the throne and contrasted the balanced, orderly, and supposedly Newtonian constitution of the British with the rule of fear in France. Desaguliers apologized for his lack of poetic talent, while assuming that his true mission was to convey scientific ideas in a palatable manner. Eschewing tedious detail for broad sweeps of the brush, he repeated the already established idea of a feminine Nature submitting to rapacious masculine science:

> Nature compell'd, his [Newton's] piercing Mind, obeys,
> And gladly shews him all her secret Ways;
> Gainst *Mathematicks* she has no Defence,
> And yields t'experimental Consequence.
> (quoted in Kramer et al. 2003: 92)

Women and Science

Although women were largely debarred from professional qualifications of any sort, we should not forget that they too could contribute to the scientific Enlightenment: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was the prime mover in importing the technique of smallpox inoculation from the Middle East. Smallpox was the greatest killer of the century and the destroyer of female beauty: Montagu records her own case in "Saturday. The Small-Pox" (*Six Town Eclogues*, 1747, in Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 282). Although Montagu was an aristocratic exception to the rule in terms of her own social power, education, and indeed general self-confidence, other female poets felt able, however cautiously, to participate in the poetic and scientific revolution of the time. Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, wrote "The Spleen" as an account of her own suffering from a condition (also known as "the vapours" or "hypochondria") that nowadays we might loosely term depression, and showed a similarly detailed medical knowledge of her state. Partly because of her husband's friendship with William Stukeley, her poem was included in the treatise *Of the Spleen* which Stukeley had delivered initially as the Gulstonian lectures to the Royal College of Physicians in 1722 (Lawlor and Suzuki 2003: 67ff.). Stukeley evidently saw no incompatibility between Finch's more subjective, poetic

intervention and his own apparently technical and exclusively masculine discourse. By contrast, Alexander Pope's "Cave of Spleen" in *The Rape of the Lock* was also informed by medical thought (Sena 1979) but used the Spleen as a means of castigating large numbers of the female population: few escaped.

Lady Mary Chudleigh legitimated her poetic imaginings by using science in biblical paraphrases in the physico-theological strain, and was possibly the first poet to do so (Jones 1966: 41). Building on an ancient tradition, she amplified praise of God in Nature through science by reworking the *Benedicite* to include Descartes' theory of vortices around the stars. Elizabeth Rowe wrote in a similar vein, while Elizabeth Carter translated Francesco Algarotti's *Newtonianism for the Ladies* (1739) and used science frequently in her poems.

Mary Leapor perhaps best reflects the problematic position of the female poet in relation to the "hard" science of Newtonian theory in her "The Enquiry." Obviously stimulated by the marvels of the New Science, her imagination runs riot among both the stars and the miniature worlds to be found in "drops of dew" (l. 54). Yet she concludes her poem apologetically, stating that whoever "follows Nature through her mazy Way . . . Has need of Judgment better taught than mine" (ll. 84–7). Even if "grave-fac'd Wisdom may itself be wrong" (l. 89), Leapor is unable to envisage herself as central to the scientific project – or at least its representation – in the way that a male poet might have done. When natural history began to displace Newtonian natural philosophy, later female poets were able to capitalize on earlier traditions of female interest in botany and ornithology as "domestic" pursuits: flower tapestries had been popular for centuries (Grant 2003: xiv). Yet still women were marginalized by the sheer masculine dominance of the general scientific project.

Politics

If science was politicized in the eighteenth century, it was in a complex manner. The debate between the ancients and the moderns saw science as a phenomenon of modernity, and defenders of the ancients such as Swift considered certain types of scientific endeavor to be ludicrous, as he makes plain in his satire on the Royal Society's apparently bizarre experiments in the third book of *Gulliver's Travels*. Yet members of the largely Tory, anti-modern Scriblerus Club such as Pope, Dr. Arbuthnot, Gay, and Parnell, were far from opposed to scientific enterprise: they merely had their doubts about its limits, as most religious people did in the period. Arbuthnot himself, as noted above, was a member of the Royal Society, and was easily capable of satirizing scientific folly while writing such influential tomes as *An Essay Concerning the Nature of the Aliments* (1731) and the *Essay Concerning the Effects of Air* (1733).

True, there was a sense in which science could be seen as a primarily Whiggish vogue, with its bold sense of progress and embrace of the modern. Newton and Locke (the father of the sciences of the mind) were Whig icons; Addison's *Spectator* blended science well with its Whig politics; and James Thomson praised the Whig Prime

Minister Walpole in his elegy to Newton. Indeed, Thomson's dynamic Nature seems Whiggish in its entrepreneurial energies. The *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society had practical application in mind; poems like John Dyer's *The Fleece* (Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 241) reflected the use of science for national improvement. Science was seen in Europe as a way of freeing oneself from the imposed ignorance of despotic monarchies and religions, although in England science remained largely, at least in poetry, the servant of religion. Sir Richard Blackmore, a Whig, medic, and poet now famed for his place in Pope's *Dunciad*, used the subtle mechanism of the human body as well as the Newtonian universe to illustrate God's power as artificer in his epic poem *The Creation* (1712). Christine Gerrard (1994) and Abigail Williams (2005) have shown that Whig poetry has been unfairly characterized as dunce-like by the powerful representations of poets like Pope: Blackmore's scientific poem is certainly more enjoyable than some of his long-winded historical epics.

Satires

From its very inception the New Science was promising material for satire, especially in its institutional manifestation, the Royal Society. To early modern eyes, used to a nonexperimental world-view, the activities of the scientists could seem downright bizarre, if not actually atheistic. The main target was the "virtuoso" or person who collected all kinds of oddities and grotesques from nature in the name of science, thus violating both moral and aesthetic codes at once. Dr. Samuel Garth's mock-heroic poem *The Dispensary* (1699) famously satirized an undignified squabble between the physicians and apothecaries (roughly equivalent to today's pharmacists) and described Horoscope, a "virtuoso" apothecary who collects all manner of strange objects from mummies to shark heads, flying fish to alligators, and "dry'd bladders" to "drawn teeth" (ii. 122ff.). Pope, whose *Rape of the Lock* had been influenced by Garth's poem, famously attacked scientists in the fourth book of his *Dunciad* (1742), where they feature in the parade of false learning. Pope's thwarted political hopes lead him to use science here – in contrast to the progressive vision of *Windsor-Forest* – as an emblem of political disintegration. The scientists, "A tribe with weeds and shells fantastic crown'd," present Queen Caroline with a rare flower and name it after her: for Pope, Britain's Whig rulers encourage dullness and an obsession with irrelevant trivia (iv. 398ff.). Although his focus here is on natural history, not on the glories of Newtonian science, nevertheless the end of the *Dunciad* constitutes an anti-Newtonian apocalypse: not as an attack on Newton, but in the tradition of divines and poets imagining the end of the world, now updated by New Science (Jones 1966: 47).

As might be expected, female pretensions to scientific knowledge were the butt of much anti-feminist satire. Edward Young's *Universal Passion*, Satire V, "On Women" (1727) attacks the fickle attentions of a society lady to science: "Of Desagulier she bespeaks fresh air / And Whiston has engagements with the fair" (Young 1774, vol. 1, ll. 335–6). All enthusiasm vanishes, however, when her lap-dog proves more

compelling: "Lo! Pug from Jupiter her heart has got, / Turns out the stars, and Newton is a sot" (ll. 341–2).

The shift to natural history later in the century brought with it new opportunities for satire, not least when the return of Sir Joseph Banks from a scientific expedition to the South Seas with Captain Cook in 1773 and his potential election to the presidency of the Royal Society made him a perfect target for ridicule. Particularly suspect to many was the investigation into an apparently promiscuous plant sexuality that poets and scientists alike could not help anthropomorphizing: "An Historic Epistle, from Omiah, the Queen of Otaheite" attacked the grotesque combinations discovered by the virtuosi, "How Zoöphyte plants with animals unite, / Where corals copulate, and spunges bite" (quoted in Jones 1966: 195). James Perry's "Mimosa: or, the Sensitive Plant" (1779) used the famous plant, apparently endowed with animal sensibility, as a phallic metaphor, the poem itself – dedicated to Banks – detailing sex scandals of the day in botanic language (Grant 2003: 107). The obscenity of the poem's plant analogy is blatant:

> Can *Lady Fete-champetre* want
> A *touch* of this elastic *plant*,
> When she so much adores it?
> No – on the wings of love she flies,
> And at an Inn, the *plant* she tries;
> In absence of her DORS—T.

Perry had supplied a note explaining that the lady in question rode to meet her husband "for a *tete à tete*" but missed him and ended up spending three days "in the *rage* of a frolic" with his friend, Captain S—— (Grant 2003: 118).

Natural History and Earth Sciences

After the middle of the century, and especially after the classification scheme of Linnaeus had become commonly available, the vogue for astronomical and microscopic physico-theological sublimity began to wane, and a new emphasis on natural history emerged in British poetry. The already popular traditions of landscape description in genres such as the georgic absorbed and were revivified by an infusion of scientific interest and imagery. Poets of all types embraced a more modest scale centered on animals and birds, flowers and plants; the accessibility of natural-historical pursuits such as botany and ornithology opened a greater space for women to participate in the confluence between the organic sciences and poetry. The aesthetic aspects of the natural world were also being imported into people's homes in the form of lavishly illustrated color engravings, especially of birds and flowers: an art that had benefited from recent developments in print technology.

The gifts of science to poetry were theorized in Dr. John Aikin's *Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (1777). Aikin, the brother of Anna Barbauld,

argued that natural history could enliven the "worn down, enfeebled, and fettered" state of modern poetry: "While the votary of science is continually gratified with new objects opening to his view, the lover of poetry is wearied and disgusted with a perpetual repetition of the same images, clad in almost the same language" (1777: iv). James Thomson's descriptions of nature in his *Seasons* – praised by Aikin – were hugely influential in the second half of the eighteenth century and beyond, providing a model for the incorporation of scientific knowledge and imagery into verse. In his *Lives of the Poets* Dr. Johnson noted that Thomson's knowledge of natural history had helped him "to recollect and to combine, to range his discoveries and to amplify the sphere of his contemplation" (Johnson 1975: vol. 2, 359).

A further impetus to the rise of natural history was the expansion of empire and the concomitant scientific exploration of foreign lands. The combination of a long tradition of importing flora and fauna to various institutions for medical and other purposes and the general increase in trade resulted in poems like James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* (1764) which, as well as being an important document in the history of the slave trade, provided large tracts of information on the natural history of the West Indies. Poems such as George Ritso's "Kew Gardens" (1763) and Henry Jones's "Kew Garden" (1767) described and praised the rich collections there and reflected the importation of the exotic in the homeland. The almost incidental mention of the flora and fauna of Corsica in Anna Laetitia Barbauld's primarily political poem of that name (1773) reveals the absorption of natural history into all kinds of poetry:

> Thy swelling mountains, brown with solemn shade
> Of various trees, that wave their giant arms
> O'er the rough sons of freedom; lofty pines,
> And hardy fir, and ilex ever green,
> And spreading chestnut . . .
> Wildly spreads
> The arbutus, and rears his scarlet fruit
> Luxuriant, mantling o'er the craggy steeps;
> And thy own native laurel crowns the scene.
> (ll. 48–62, in Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 473)

Barbauld had clearly used her reading on the subject of Corsican natural history – itself inspired by James Boswell's *Account* of Corsica (1768) – to reinforce a point about an indomitable Corsica as the symbol of freedom: the "native laurel" at the end of the passage is a culminating totem of victory for the hardy island.

Advances in what one can call the "earth sciences," including geography, vulcanology, mineralogy, hydrography, and, relatedly, paleontology, influenced poets and fashionable society in general throughout the period. Pope's famous grotto, filled with geological specimens, was constructed in precise consultation with a scientific adviser, while polite ladies as well as gentlemen would take tours around mines and other notable sites, as in John Dalton's "A Descriptive Poem, addressed to Two Ladies at their Return from Viewing the Mines near Whitehaven" (1755, in Hamblyn 2003: 141). Geology also mirrored the discoveries in astronomy in that it expanded the

eighteenth century's idea of time which, like the universe, seemed much more vast than before. Earthquakes, particularly the disastrous Lisbon one of 1755, prompted poetic reflection on the destructive power of nature and whether a just God could allow such events. In England, the general response reflected Pope's optimism. In a different context he argued that "Whatever is, is Right" (*Essay on Man*, i. 294): natural phenomena that seem to be senselessly destructive are part of a larger plan unknown to limited mortal vision. As the cult of the sublime gathered pace, mountains assumed greater importance in their mysterious vastness, and became occasions for poetic inspiration in contemplating the glories of God (Nicolson 1959). Helen Maria Williams's "A Hymn written among the Alps" (1798) ends with the unequivocal statement: "In nature's vast, overwhelming power, / THEE, THEE, My GOD, I trace! (ll. 79–80, in Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 539). Even the new mining technology, with its "vast machinery," might seem sublime to the awestruck observer, as Anna Seward's "Colebrook Dale" illustrated (Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 525 and headnote).

Sensibility

If science enabled some poetry of the period – Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, for example – to celebrate the powers of nation, empire, and commerce in looking outward and conquering the world in the same way that Newton had conquered the theoretical universe, it also allowed the development of what has been called the "cult" of sensibility, a notion closely allied with the sentimental mode. By midcentury a form of poetry had emerged that looked inward – often prompted by the beauty of nature and accompanied by moral philosophizing – and attended self-consciously to the poet's own mental processes. Young, Thomson, Akenside, Finch, Gray, Warton, Charlotte Smith, and many more embraced the possibilities of this more lyrical mode. "Cult," however, is a misleading term for the extremely popular idea that sensitive people were so partly because of their upper-class lifestyle and partly because of their innately refined physiology: G. J. Barker-Benfield's term "culture of sensibility" is a more accurate description of this wide-ranging phenomenon (1992).

In fact, it was the "nerve" medicine of the New Science, in which surgeons had begun to investigate the specific realities of the dissected human body, that produced an appreciation of the nervous system as the transmitter of sensations to the human mind. Thomas Willis had argued that the only seat of the human soul was the brain, a discovery which then forced people to recognize the importance of the nerves – envisaged in the eighteenth-century as vibrating wires, strings on a musical instrument, or even hair. These were potent metaphors in the literature of the period, as Akenside demonstrates when talking of the poet's calling in *The Pleasures of Imagination*: like Memnon's quiveringly responsive harp-strings, "the finer organs of the mind" are attuned by nature so that an external stimulus "Thrills thro' imagination's tender frame, / From nerve to nerve" (ll. 109ff., in Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 310). Healthy nerves would have the correct amount of "spring"; but if the body were to be abused through high

living or mental distress, then the nerves could become "relaxed," and disorder of both body and mind could result. The sufferer was not "relaxed" in our sense, however, but hypersensitive to external stimuli, closely allying the twin states of pleasure and pain. Naturally, poets were considered a sensitive race and so especially prone to states of melancholy, anxiety, and "spleen." The old idea of poets suffering for their art was given a new scientific rationale by eighteenth-century nerve science, leading directly to the image of the Romantic poet (Lawlor and Suzuki 2003: ix, xvii).

Romanticism

The old cliché about Romanticism being hostile to science is wrong. Recent scholarship has shown that science was a vital part of Romantic culture: Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, the Shelleys, Charlotte Smith – all had dealings with scientists and were often active in scientific pursuits themselves (see Hawley 2003–4). True, Blake did indeed state that "Art is the Tree of Life . . . Science is the Tree of Death," and Keats – medically trained himself – did protest about Newton's dissection of the rainbow. Some Romantic poets had objections to some types of science: the botanical and life sciences were far more hospitable than other strands to the organicism prevalent in German Romanticism and later in Britain. Yet even Blake, the notorious foe of a mechanistic and dehumanizing science that supposedly forced people into factories, shared an old ambiguity about the status of science. He agreed with the physico-theologians that God's glory is revealed in the close examination of nature; his nature, though, was not the mathematical reduction of a Newton but the marvelous detail of the observant natural historian. It is ironic, given his reputation, that Blake's motto to "Auguries of Innocence" encapsulates with lyric simplicity the core theme of eighteenth-century scientific poetry:

> To see a world in a grain of sand,
> And a heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And eternity in an hour.

See also chs. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 17, "Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination*"; 32, "Whig And Tory Poetics."

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4
Poetry and Religion

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"To feel, is to be fired; / And to believe, Lorenzo! is to feel," cries the narrator of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–5: iv. 199–200), directing us to the central preoccupation of eighteenth-century religious poetry: to move the reasoning reader into the emotional experience of faith. In a period suspicious of enthusiastic expression and wherein Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, could declare: "There is no profusion of the ethereal spirit among us," poets like Young sought to supernaturalize the nation by uniting it as a Christian community bound by poetry (Sichel 1901–2: vol. 1, 93). He was not alone in his mission. Many poets of the age fought to spiritualize society by versifying orthodox and free thought; rational and mystical beliefs; private and communal expression; and moral and benevolent codes of practice. Poetry and religion had long been coupled, and the eighteenth century witnessed the two converge in their development. Evangelicalism's progress was recorded in the hymn; nonconformism secured itself to original renderings of scripture in biblical paraphrase; Newtonian imaginings located theology within an interstellar cosmos; and new conceptions of death and the afterlife emerged in the graveyard verses on which Romanticism was built. At the same time, we are almost obliged to agree with Johnson's proclamation that religion is so "habitually interwoven with the whole texture of life" that its associated poetry "cannot be seen as a coherent *kind* of writing" (Johnson 1906: vol. 1, 130–1). This is not to say that religious poetry resists definition, but that its themes and ideas were deeply absorbed in the minds and hearts of the public; even the illiterate held dear that which emanated from the pulpit.

Believers and nonbelievers alike were constantly confronted with religious poetry, at the very least in the numerous editions and translations of the Bible. Dissenters continued to read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*; and Isaac Watts's and Philip Doddridge's gentle nonconformism generated a modern musical liturgy in which the hymn was reconfigured to stir the emotions as much as the mind. Feeling had always been key to evangelical dissent, an approach to religion that invested in the primacy of the believer's own experience of religion. One of the few Puritan traditions accepted by

rational and evangelical dissent alike was acceptance of the heart and affections as the guides of the will and understanding. Rationalists, however, molded the knowledge of the heart into both a religious psychology and a philosophical exploration of what constitutes human nature, whereas evangelicals tended to elevate such knowledge as a way of subverting an increasingly rational and intellectual climate in religious debate. Watts and Doddridge were ideally qualified to manage such deliberation: the former raised in orthodox Calvinism but settling as a moderate; the latter siding with a strain of low Calvinism which opposed both orthodoxy and rational dissent as cold and dry belief-systems. Both agreed on the task of reviving a vital and practical religion, one that stressed the role of feeling in producing moral action. Reason might have allowed the believer to receive, test, and accept revelation; but without feeling, Watts wrote, it was a "poor, dark bewildered thing," unable to grasp knowledge or provide an impetus for good works (Watts 1800: vol. 1, 192).

Watts could make such a claim only because of the continued and profound influence of Milton, whose vehement support for private judgment had rendered Protestantism an infinitely interpretable belief-system (Young 2000). Numerous Anglican and dissenting positions thus splintered further into skepticism, the rejection of revealed religion, and deism. Deism held a particular appeal for the eighteenth century, disseminated by John Toland, whose *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) renounced revealed religion in favor of a natural religion presided over by an unknowable sovereign power or deity. Such free-thinking pushed orthodox Christians into a corner from which theologians like Joseph Butler and William Law turned back to revealed and mystical religion as a defense against reason and rationality. Law in particular was appalled by the interpretative leeway granted by latitudinarian clergy on religious subjects, fueled by the philosophical and scientific advances achieved by Locke and Newton. Their quest for a moral science forged through natural philosophy launched a revolution of thought which constructed a framework for questioning, discussing, and ultimately undermining Christianity. Locke insisted that verse itself was an impractical and useless aspect of education, distrusting poetic and rhetorical thinking as that which muddied simple, biblical religion. However, while for Locke creed, poetics, and tradition cluttered faith, Addison, Charles Gideon, Matthew Prior, and Mark Akenside stood up to defend poetry against his attack as the foundation for orthodox and nonconformist belief and literature alike (Sitter 2001: 137).

Newton sought to tidy up in a different way, arguing that the world and the spaces beyond it functioned together as one scientifically forged and theologically controlled expanse (Morris 1972: 2). His rejection of innate ideas served to release the question of God's existence from empirical debate into the realm of human experience, as Young's *Night Thoughts* evinces; and yet Law considered Newton's theories unnecessary distractions from true faith founded on God's all-embracing love. In *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728), for example, Law instructed the believer to pray privately, spontaneously, and affectively, but always with a thought for the Christian community of which one was part. His universe was a contest between light and dark, love and hate, rather than something to be rationally or scientifically measured out.

John Wesley was influenced by both rationalism and mysticism, working to achieve a living faith driven by an emphasis on passionate religious experience, but located within Anglicanism. Eighteenth-century evangelicals were fiercely opposed to Protestant free-thinkers, especially when they attempted to undermine the foundations of the Church. In 1772, for example, a group of nonconformist clergy petitioned Parliament for relief from subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, an unpopular move with orthodox Anglicans. Opening up a debate over what should and should not be believed fragmented Christians even further, pushing some to turn back to Calvinism and others to reject Trinitarianism altogether in favor of Unitarianism. Developing out of the moderate wing of Presbyterianism, Unitarianism sought to elevate Christ as an exemplary model of Christian love and wisdom, rather than the embodiment of divinity, although its members were notoriously diverse in their beliefs and opinions. They were, however, united by their emotional commitment to philanthropic pursuits, and in this way were part, as were many belief-systems of this period, of a humanitarian religious revival from which Romanticism emerged. This chapter will consider how such a revival developed along the same tracks as poetry, working through, first, contemporary poetics; second, the hymn; third, biblical paraphrase; and finally, the Newtonian, yet still profoundly Christian, "universe" poem.

Poetics

Eighteenth-century treatises on poetry tend to launch into its defense, heralding it as the genre most able to teach us, in Pope's words, "Things *unknown*": cognitive and emotional (*Essay on Criticism*, l. 575, in Pope 1988). As the most profound of all that is inexplicable, God was considered a tricky subject best approached through a form able to handle mystery gently, releasing the reader from the strictures of reason and into the realms of religious experience. Milton had already stressed the significance of poetry for a thorough, general education and stated that while philosophical rhetoric was perhaps more subtly complex, poetry was "more simple, sensuous and passionate," able to speak to the heart as well as the mind (Milton 1951: 68). As John Sitter argues, poetry was considered a powerful pedagogical tool in the eighteenth century because it was deemed best able to depict sensory things, such as the experiential and the mystical (Sitter 2001: 140). Poetry, it was thought, sweetened the medicinal requirements of morality and virtue so that they could act on the individual without his or her assent, repairing and healing the damaged body and soul. This is what John Dennis meant when he argued for poetry's redemptive potential, and his focus on poetic and religious experience is essential to understanding the fervent works of Smart and Young, both of whom regarded poetry as a hotline to the heavens. As Dennis insisted: "he who is entertained with an acomplish'd Poem, is, for a Time, at least, restored to Paradise. That happy Man converses boldly with Immortal Beings. Transported, he beholds the Gods ascending and descending, and every Passion, in

its Turn, is charm'd, while his Reason is supremely satisfied" (Dennis 1939–43: vol. 1, 257, 264).

Eliciting both enthused feeling and balanced reflection, poetry was considered the spark which would ignite in the reader not simply excitement or sensation, but meditation and thoughtfulness, preparing the mind for religious contemplation (Morris 1972: 50). Poetical language is the mirror of nature here, both full of an edenic verve or spirit Dennis calls "joy." While his work paled under the brighter light of Joseph Addison, the two men agreed that God created nature and humankind in such a manner as to allow for "a Satiety of Joy, and an uninterrupted Happiness" (Addison 1965: vol. 3, nos. 387, 454). Addison's very thesis in his essays on cheerfulness for *The Spectator* exerted that the "transient Gleams of Joy" one might feel walking through a field or a wood grant a "Vernal Delight" which the believer can refine and "improve" into a transcendent Christian experience (Addison 1965: vol. 3, 393: 476). Nature, then, was more than just a witness to the existence of God: also a force able to both humble and uplift the reader of religious poetry into an aestheticized state of worship. James Thomson argued the same in *The Seasons* (1726–30), claiming in the "Preface" to the second edition of "Winter" that poetry had the power to "unworld" believers, awakening them to reflect upon and deeply feel their natural environment (Irlam 1999). Since Newton had judged the universe a "sensorium of the Godhead," this environment included the heavens and beyond, that which Addison envisioned as a space wherein the planets are God's choir and the stars sparkly minstrels, "For ever singing, as they shine, / 'The hand that made us is Divine'" ("The Spacious Firmament on High," ll. 23–4). Only verse might direct us to apprehend such religious harmonies, paramount as the source of that spiritual training the individual requires for creatively seeing as well as imaginatively interpreting nature in a joyful manner.

Addison claimed to have been educated by the poetry of the Bible, and he wrote paraphrases of the nineteenth and twenty-third Psalms, both of which focus on nature's glory and the pastoral aesthetic. Such paraphrases were, as we shall see, immensely popular in the period, predominantly because they acted as testimonies to the force of the Bible, which had been regarded as the model for all religious poetry since Longinus' *On the Sublime*. Yet the poetry of the Bible is nowhere more significantly elucidated than in Robert Lowth's *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (1753), delivered in Oxford between 1741 and 1750, and translated as *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* in 1787. Lowth established the sublime as an aesthetic category, and approached the Bible not exegetically but interpretatively, so prefiguring Johnson's "invention" of literary criticism in *Lives of the Poets* (1779–81). The *Lectures* were intended to illuminate the unique and inherently sacred nature of Hebrew poetry, a factor linked to the congruity of artistic flair and moral purity within; yet at the same time Lowth wanted to show how flexible neoclassicism was, able to address art, artist, work, and audience together. In turn, this allowed Lowth to break down Hebrew poetry into the elegiac, didactic, lyric, idyllic, dramatic, and prophetic modes, whereas Addison, Dennis, and Isaac Watts had been content to compare it only to classicism. Lowth was pioneering in other ways too: predating Burke, he absorbed Longinus and Boileau

to expound the nature of the sublime; he recognized before Kant that both the body and imagination were affected by emotional and passionate experiences provoked by religion and sublimity; he reconsidered the relationship between poetry and music in public worship to provide a foundation for the development of the hymn; and, looking forward to Wordsworth, he valued Hebrew poetry for its modest and uncultivated aptitude for articulating the meditative, spontaneous, and expressive role of the poet. As Erich Auerbach reminds us, Lowth crushed an aristocratic preference for style and functionality in poetry with a dynamic Judeo-Christian view in which the weakest of men and lowliest of objects were infused with sublime importance (Auerbach 1953). The example of a powerless carpenter rising to enact the most fundamental event of history – the Crucifixion – was illustration enough for contemporary believers.

Like many Oxford lectures given in Latin, Lowth's were summarized and excerpted in English in the periodical press (the *Monthly Review*) soon after their publication, a process which served to disseminate their main points more widely. Essentially, Lowth argued that poetry instructs and gives pleasure to the reader because it proceeds from divine inspiration; with its origin in religion, its purpose is "to form the human mind to the constant habit of true virtue and piety" (Lowth 1969: vol. 1, i. 37–8, ii. 45). Lowth considered poetry able to achieve such ends because of its meter, style, and form, and structured the *Lectures* around these qualities accordingly. The meter of Hebrew poetry is addressed in Lecture III, its "true rhythm, modulation, metre" so strong that even when translated it retains its "native dignity, and a faint appearance of versification" (Lowth 1969: vol. 1, iii. 65, 71). Easily learned by rote, poetry preserves religious truths in measure and rhythm, rather than augmenting or corrupting them; it is able to "captivate the ear and the passions, which assists the memory," and infuse them "in the mind and heart" (Lowth 1969: vol. 1, iv. 88). Stylistically, such poetry resembles the parable to which it is etymologically tied, borrowing both familiar and domestic imagery from common life and also sacred themes from religious history to metaphorically communicate God's word. Even where the latter is obscure and ambiguous, it is still able to reveal the sometimes terrifying and overwhelming grandeur of God's dominion by exciting the passions within. Lowth admits that much poetry is on the side of the "language of the Passions," thus allowing the most "vehement" conceptions to "burst out in a turbid stream" on the page; the "language of Reason," on the other hand, "is cool, temperate, rather humble than elevated," taking care to calm the believer beset by God's sublimity (Lowth 1969: vol. 1, xiv. 308–9). The triumph of Hebrew poetry, however, is that it finds a way between the two extremes, at once "plain, correct, chaste and temperate" while hurrying along "the free spirit" of the reader as it lays bare "all the affections and emotions" of the speaker. As Lowth declares:

> The language of poetry [is] the effect of mental emotion. . . . the passions and affections are the elements and principles of human action; they are all in themselves good, useful, and virtuous; and, when fairly and naturally employed, not only lead to useful ends and purposes, but actually prompt and stimulate to virtue. It is the office of poetry

> to incite, to direct, to temper the passions, and not to extinguish them. (Lowth 1969: vol. 1, xvii. 366–70)

Lowth echoes Aristotle's assertion that good poetry prunes the passions and keeps them in check: whether gentle, elegiac, and lyrical, or prophetic, sublime, and violent, the poem must balance reason and emotion in the reader (Lowth 1969: vol. 2, xviii. 10, 17–18). One technique for achieving this is Lowth's notion of parallelism, a term related to biblical typology but more specifically signifying the correspondence of one verse, or line, with another (Lowth 1969: vol. 1, xix. 32, n. 10). Sometimes parallelism worked to repeat a sentiment in the same way: "The sea saw, and fled; / Jordan turned back: / . . . What ailed thee, O Sea, that thou fleddest; Jordan that thou turnedst back"? (Psalms 114: 5). Yet it also worked antithetically, where sentiments are set against sentiments: "Jehovah killeth and maketh alive; / He casteth down to hell, and lifteth up" (1 Sam. 2: 6–7; Lowth 1969: vol. 1, xix. 35ff.). We might think about parallelism in terms of sung praise, Christianity inheriting the Jewish custom of singing in alternate chorus, or by way of a series of antiphonal responses, to which the Psalms were ideally suited. The practice of singing psalms laid the foundation for the development of the hymn, itself a form in which religious truths, phrases, and ideas are repeated and shared in slightly altered states. Like Lowth's *Lectures*, the hymn in this period served to reinvent Hebrew poetry for a newly philosophical and scientific age, while at the same time retaining an emphasis on Christian virtues.

Hymnody

Johnson did the hymn no favors when he insisted that the "essence of poetry is invention," prefiguring a Romantic understanding of verse as an organic product of the private imagination (Johnson 1906: vol. 2, 267). The hymn, however, puts private inspiration into communal form, channeling religious emotion of the kind Lowth and Dennis considered pivotal to faith within a public address to God. While disciplined in structure, the hymn freely referred to the whole of the Bible, Christian doctrine, and the human soul, and, as a form sung over and over by believers, captured aspects of faith within the memory to increase their emotional impact and intensity. As Lowth recognized, the hymn worked particularly well as metrical parallelism, its common, short, and long meters briskly demanding faithful responses granted by its rhythm. J. R. Watson argues that hymns are also "hermeneutical acts," compact reinterpretations of scripture that accord with the needs of their time: Addison, Watts, Doddridge, and the Wesleys all wrote hymns in a society newly aware of scientific, monarchical, mercantile, and theological change (Watson 1997: 19–20). Watts in particular based his hymnody on a system of belief drawn from the study of philosophy and theology, one that celebrates together the importance of revealed religion and the glory of God in the created world. The hymns sung within the dissenting meetings he attended as a young man were such dreary chants that the congregation was lulled to sleep rather

than awoken from material concerns. To counter this, Watts aspired toward clarity, as much as piety, in his hymns, both as a way of imparting the truth of the gospel and also to confidently render the world in its most "simple nature" (Watts 1786). His hymns are not without sublimity or vigor: "Desiring to Love Christ," for example, stages a sexualized encounter with God that is barely controlled:

> O 'tis a Thought would melt a Rock,
> And make a Heart of Iron move,
> That those sweet Lips, that heavenly Look
> Should seek and wish a mortal Love!
> (ll. 5–8)

The individual singing worshipper, as much as Watts's narrator, might claim the identity of the "mortal love" here, physically impressed upon by God's presence and, in verse four, embraced by Christ's "naked arms" even as they become strung-out limbs "nail'd to tort'ring smart" (l. 22). Such corporeal sensuality also marked those verses included in Watts's *Horae Lyricae* (1706), *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), and *The Psalms of David* (1719), equally simple but densely theological and turning to the New Testament, rather than the Old, for inspiration. Certainly Watts grew anxious that a focus on the non-Christian books of the Bible diverted believers from the Anglican faith and into the contemplation of Jewish figures and ideas. Recasting the Hebrew as Christian by writing Jesus into the Old Testament, Watts could, for example, render Psalm ninety-seven's "Jehovah reigns, let all the Earth / In his just Government rejoyce" as "He reigns! the Lord the Saviour reigns! / Praise him in evangelic strains."

The hymn was ideally suited to the expression of evangelic strains, tailoring the emotion stored up within for the realms of public devotion: Philip Doddridge, for example, found that on singing Watts's "Give me the wings of faith to rise," his congregation was moved to tears, and yet saved from "any overwhelming sorrows, or transporting joys" by the discipline of organized worship (Watts 1800: vol. 2, 349). Doddridge's own hymns were rather milder than his friend's, softening the scriptures so that Christ was more likely to appear as a gentle shepherd enfolding his flock than as a lover brutally drawn over a cross. Both men were committed to the hymn as a platform on which to stage the internal workings of the religious heart, Watts's lucid, reflective, and surrendering poetic a foundation for Doddridge's encouraging, counseling, and thoughtful verses. At the same time, the clergymen were aware that emotive expression could seem either too heated or too sentimental, inviting, as Isabel Rivers argues, contempt, ridicule, or condescension from those who considered feeling a purely private matter. Watts thus tempered the passionate avowal of faith he promoted in his hymns by issuing cautionary prose statements against enthusiasm. He even concluded his aptly entitled *Discourses of the Love of God, and the Use and Abuse of the Passions in Religion* (1729) with a warning that however full of love the believer might be for God, he or she must always remember that religion "does not consist in

vehement commotions of animal nature" (Watts 1800: vol. 2, 349). Watts's legatee, Anne Steele, also believed that love should be tenderly enunciated if framed in the civic terrain of the hymn, and she sought to feminize the form by rendering her speaker a demure, if deeply feeling, lover of Christ. As she writes in verse thirty-eight of "Redeeming Love":

I yield, to thy dear conqu'ring arms
I yield my captive soul:
O let thy all-subduing charms
My inmost pow'rs controul!

The warm and intimate desire communicated here was felt equally by Steele's predecessor, Elizabeth Rowe, whose *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1737) was prefaced by Watts's admiring, but guarded, introduction to its tender and lyrical exclamations. Exclamatory her verses were, but Rowe specifically avoided the hymn form in order to shape an at once yearning and retiring devotional lyric voiced from solitary corners rather than from public pews. Here is the fifth verse of "Seraphic Love":

How strongly thou, my panting heart, dost move,
With all the holy ecstasies of love!
In these sweet flames let me expire, and see
Unveil'd the brightness of thy deity.
(ll. 17–20)

Longing to erase herself within the flames of extreme faith rather than assert desire for God publicly, Rowe is intent on asserting personal piety and faith. Certainly the Congregationalist note of toleration implicit in Watts's and Doddridge's old dissenting hymns enabled such unbounded, and yet privately contemplative, faith. It was not until the innovations made by the Wesleys that the hymn became one of the most compelling, urgent, and furious examples of eighteenth-century religious poetry, composed primarily to revive and then save the Christian soul.

Regarded as the founder of Methodism, John Wesley was a High Churchman who forged his religious constancy as a counter to the worldliness of university life at Oxford, where he studied in the 1720s. He was deemed a "Methodist" by his friends for following a strict religious regime, and in 1738 underwent an enthusiastic conversion in which he was struck by a conviction of the love of a personal Saviour (Jay 1983: 3). Personal salvation took second place only to his will to save others, and Wesley initiated a huge conversion project, in which hundreds of thousands of believers were transformed by their own physical and emotional experience of God (Hempton 1984: 12). Wesley's discovery of singing as a way to aid conversion was made during his voyage to Georgia just before his own enlightenment: on board ship were a group of Moravians whose mystical Puritanism attracted the preacher far more than the latitudinarian tone of his home church. Collecting and translating their

hymns for publication, Wesley increased the number of syllables in each line to alter and expand the meter, so allowing for a build-up of images and sense impressions that would shape his early *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1738) as well as the much later and immensely popular *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780). This form, the conversion hymn, was energetically and brilliantly practiced by Wesley's brother Charles, a profoundly skilled and moving writer whose subtle phraseology captured the range of feelings the believer encounters on the Christian journey. Above all, however, Charles successfully employed the medium of rhetorical questioning to lay bare his own astonishing joy in faith, declaring in "Free Grace":

> And can it be, that I should gain
> An interest in the Saviour's blood?
> Died he for me, who caused his pain?
> For me? Who him to death pursued?
> Amazing love! How can it be
> That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
> (ll. 1–6)

The agenda of Charles's conversion hymns was political as well as personal, however, and he often added to the scriptural passages on which his verses were based to reflect the social conditions of his age. "Christ the friend of sinners," for example, draws on Mark 2: 17 to address those who feel unworthy before God; however, Charles lists such sinners, not simply as the weak or misled, but more specifically as "Harlots, and publicans, and thieves" (l. 26). His hymn was thus able to record a number of social issues current in the public conscience: prostitution, petty crime, and financial exploitation are all brought to light here and secured to the Bible as a point of moral, as well as religious, reference (see Watson 1997: 227–8).

Biblical Paraphrase

The Protestant tradition had always encouraged the versification of scripture for a lay audience, and biblical paraphrase was popular as a way of echoing God's word while avoiding any blasphemous attempt to replicate it. Many poets in their early careers turned first to the Psalms, David being considered the greatest of all poets and, by Smart, the "scholar of the Lord." Rewriting the psalms both allowed poets to produce lyrical acts of worship and also trained them as skilled versifiers: Cowper's paraphrase of Psalm 147, for example, may seem little more than a perfunctory exercise, but it heralded the sensitive and benign contemplations of his later career. There was a considerable market for translations of the Psalms, with Sternold's and Hopkins's 1562 edition updated by Tate's and Brady's new version of 1696. In contrast, Smart's *A Translation of the Psalms of David* (1765) was largely overlooked, but warrants attention here because of its imaginative elaborations of some of the

most familiar verses in the Bible. Let us take for an example Psalm 104. Here is the opening of the psalm as it appears in the King James Bible, beginning "Bless the Lord, O my soul":

> Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire.

Frequently cited as a paraphrase of this is Watts's "The Glory of God in Creation and Providence":

> The heav'ns are for his curtains spread,
> The unfathomed deep he makes his bed.
> Clouds are his chariot when he flies
> On wingèd storms across the skies.
>
> Angels, whom his own breath inspires,
> His ministers, are flaming fires;
> And swift as thought their armies move
> To bear his vengeance or his love.
> (ll. 5–12)

Where Watts humanizes God, portraying "his own breath" as the force behind the blithe angels and sizzling ministers, Smart sets the whole poem on fire, arraying his God in a robe of woven from light and drenching him with the glow sparked by angels in motion:

> With light, which thou hast purer made,
> As with a robe thou art array'd,
> Whose pow'r the world upholds;
> And hang'st the skies in beauteous blue,
> Wav'd like a curtain to the view,
> Down heav'n's high dome in folds.
>
> His chamber-beams in floods he shrouds,
> His chariots are the rolling clouds
> Upon th' etherial arch;
> And on the rapid winds their wings
> Majestical, the king of kings
> Walks in his awful march.
> (ll. 7–18)

Smart is at once lyrical and sublime here, producing a blend of what Lowth called the "vehement passions" and "gentler affections" to produce the ideal poetic expres-

sion (Lowth 1969: vol. 2, xxxiv. 424). Nor was it only the Psalms that inspired such a model fusion of styles: Job was elevated to the highest place in Lowth's *Lectures*, inspiring compelling interpretations by Blackmore, Young, and Blake; and the Song of Solomon was regarded by Lowth as "expressive of the utmost fervour as well as the utmost delicacy of passion" (Lowth 1969: vol. 2, xxx. 298). Certainly Samuel Croxall's paraphrase of the Song as *The Fair Circassian, a Dramatic Performance* (1720) was impassioned, almost showy; and yet the pitch reached began to provoke dismay in some readers, who found his elucidation of the narrative overly sensuous and falling, as one critic put it, "into downright carnality" (De Maar 1924: 65). Clearly such passion had to be directed back to God, a maneuver enabled by the sublime's transcendent power lifting the reader up into the heavens while enveloping the natural world inside a spell of religious grandeur. Thomas Warton's "A Paraphrase on the xiiith Chapter of Isaiah" (1748), for example, thundered with piety and sublimity, while Aaron Hill encouraged his faithful readers into a fervency of feeling that would allow them to "pray, as David pray'd before" ("An Ode, on Occasion of Mr. Handel's great Te Deum").

Repelled by enthusiasm, Hill nevertheless worried that "Ne'er did religion's languid fire / Burn fainter" than in his own day, and sought to redress such inertia by reminding readers of the damning chaos that awaited sinners after death. *Judgment-Day, A Poem* (1721) was indeed strikingly extravagant and not a little strange when read aside other religious poetry of the period:

> *Worlds* against *Worlds*, with clashing Horror driv'n,
> Dash their broad *Ruins* to the *Throne* of Heav'n!
> Thro' flaming Regions of the burning Air,
> Down rain distilling Suns, in liquid Rills,
> Mix'd with red Mountains of unmelted Fire!
> Hissing, perplex'd, with *Show'rs* of Icy Hills,
> And *Cat'ract* Seas, that *roar*, from *Worlds* still higher;
> Mingled, like driving *Hail*, they *pour* along,
> And, *thund'ring*, on our ruin'd System *fall*!
> (ll. 205–13)

The terror induced by even the idea of the final day had long captured the poetical imagination: Watts was aghast by the "shrill Outcries of the guilty Wretches" who are gnawed from within by the "living Worm" (*Judgment-Day*, ll. 17, 19). Yet this medieval vision of death shifts the reader's attention to the pain and dread felt by the individual subject, a far remove from Hill's prophetic spectacle in which the universe collapses in on itself, the air burning away amid melting suns and seas and heavens. The Revelation of St John was, with the Psalms and Job, the most paraphrased book of the Bible, the very thought of the heavens torn asunder to reveal God's fiery presence so powerful that poets feared the force of their expression. Writing of his own *A Poem on the Last Day* (1713), Young wrote:

> There is no Subject more Exalted, and Affecting, than this which I have chose; it's [*sic*] very first Mention Snatches away the Soul to the Borders of Eternity, Surrounds it with Wonders, Opens to it on every hand the most Surprizing Scenes of Awe, and Astonishment, and Terminates its view with nothing less than the Fulness of Glory, and the Throne of God. (Young 1713: sig. A3^{v})

Such a proclamation locates Young as a Newtonian, his devotion closely linked to the awe felt when confronted with the vastness of the natural world and universe: all will be destroyed, to confirm humankind's position as spiritually wanting; yet the believer will be saved, conveying the self-sufficiency of those with faith. "A mighty, mighty ruin!" writes Young of the devastated universe, yet one from which the believer is redeemed: "one *soul* / Has more to boast, and far outweighs the whole" (*A Poem on the Last Day*, iii. 294–5).

Universe Poems

For eighteenth-century believers, the horror of the last day was magnified by Newton's discoveries, the final destruction of the universe all the more shocking given its size and reach. Establishing this immensity in Christian terms was a strong motivation for many poets of the period: David Mallet's *The Excursion* (1728) offered a survey of the earth and heavens to present the energy of God's love as gravitational pull; Henry Baker's *The Universe: A Poem Intended to Restrain the Pride of Man* (1734) details the intricacy of nature and astronomy as evidence for God's existence; Isaac Browne's *Of Design and Beauty* (1734) reads the aesthetic quality of nature's design as a divine parallel to the universe's spruce order; and Henry Brooke's *Universal Beauty* (1735) focuses on the human heart as a benevolent echo of a harmonious creation. Young's *Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* was so successful because of its capacity to lyrically blend the epic realms of the universe with the quiet and elegiac emotions of the graveyard. The extent of Young's sleepless poem, which contains some ten thousand lines grouped into nine "nights," provides a reminder of the scope of the universe, intended to tune the reader into the phenomenon of an uncharted, immeasurable outer space and hence betray the brief, miserable existence of the human. Johnson even compared the poem to a Chinese plantation, both possessing "the magnificence of vast extent and endless diversity"; and John Wesley noted its "obscure" reaches in his 1770 abridgment for "common readers" (Johnson 1906: vol. 2, 418, 458; Wesley 1770: vi). At the same time, Young's narrator consoles the faithful reader by defending the Christian life to the erratic sinner Lorenzo, an atheist and deist by turns and forever embarrassed by his respondent's expressivity. "Think you my Song, too turbulent? too warm?" (iv. 628), the narrator demands of Lorenzo; and yet it is such feeling that allows him to imbibe the benevolence of the universe as a source of consolation against human despair:

> The planets of each system represent
> Kind neighbours; mutual amity prevails;
> Sweet interchange of rays, receiv'd, return'd;
> Enlightening, and enlighten'd! All, at once
> Attracting, and attracted! Patriot-like,
> None sins against the welfare of the whole,
> But their reciprocal, unselfish aid,
> Affords an emblem of millennial love.
> (ix. 698–705)

Such exuberant optimism grants relief from the poem's sometimes dark negativity only to deliberately unsettle the reader so that he or she questions and reflects upon belief and human identity: "How poor, how rich, how abject, how august, / How complicate, how wonderful, is Man!" the narrator cries (i. 68–9). The poem is firmly rooted in a logic taken from Psalm 126, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy," and Young encourages Lorenzo to "Retire, and read thy Bible, to be gay," invoking the scriptures, as Lowth does, as the ground on which to develop Christian emotion (viii. 771). Scripture cemented in poetry proves "prose-men infidels to their divinity" for Young, the lilting cadences of his verse soaring and plunging where prose stands rigid, unable to move the reader. Yet for some, *Night Thoughts* invoked too much feeling, and a series of satires on the poem followed its publication, climaxing in George Eliot's notorious attack on Young as an abstract, verbose, and radically insincere misanthrope (Eliot 1857: 27).

Yet it was precisely for genuine feeling that most eighteenth-century readers looked to Young, touched by the narrator's assurance that "Nothing can satisfy, but what confounds; / Nothing, but what astonishes, is *true*" (ix. 836–7). Boswell's sense that *Night Thoughts* was "a mass of the grandest and richest poetry that human genius has ever produced" is representative of its contemporary reception, its innovative blank verse urging the reader to find solace, not in individual phrases, but in the impact of the whole (Boswell 1792: vol. 3, 226). As Harriet Guest argues, Young, addressing a public audience in what appears a private moment, unites his readers in a virtual congregation, desocializing them from individual influences in order to heighten the impact of his didactic and devotional message (Guest 1989: 65).

Smart, however, considered Young misguided in his attempt to disperse readers only to unite them in shared isolation. For Smart, the poet's role was to revive adoration in believers and gather them in real, not imagined, communities of faith. This purpose is underlined by the antiphonal structure of his own universe poem, *Jubilate Agno*, structured as a series of psalm-like verses each beginning with the word "Let" or "For." Always concerned to build communities, Smart used his poem as a space to argue for liturgical reform of the kind that would invite more believers in:

> For it would be better if the LITURGY were musically performed. [. . .]
> For it were better for the SERVICE, if only select psalms were read.
> (B511)

Those phrases initiated by the word "For" seem to invite the reader into the private space of the poem in a manner achieved by Young; the "Let" sentences, however, own a sequential and therefore liturgical texture, a mode employed by Smart to publicly open his poem:

> Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
> Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.
> Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together.
> Let Noah and his company approach the throne of Grace, and do homage to the Ark of their Salvation.
>
> (A1–4)

The focus on God's living world here renders *Jubilate Agno* a different kind of universe poem from those noted above, however: Smart considered Newton's vision to be alien and cold, straying from the warm love of God: "For Newton nevertheless is more of error than of the truth, but I am of the WORD of GOD" (B194–5, G134). For Smart, then, the universe is not an immense cosmos but the "WORD," that which signifies at once the spirit, or energy of life, the Bible, and Christ, who himself embodies all believers and creatures: "For I have a providential acquaintance with men who bear the names of animals. . . . For I bless God to Mr Lion Mr Cock Mr Cat Mr Talbot Mr Hart Mrs Fysh Mr Grub, and Miss Lamb" (B113–14). It is not surprising that Noah's Ark offered Smart a metaphor for this divine body, one in which everything is translated back into Christ, including, famously, his "Cat Jeoffry" (B695).

Smart, like many religious poets of this period, was soon forgotten by readers, excluded from literary canons formed within a secularized milieu both apathetic to, and suspicious of, Christian devotion in any form. Yet those Romantic poets who emerged from the period – Anna Laetitia Barbauld, William Cowper, Blake, Wordsworth, Felicia Hemans – were not only well versed in the religious poetry discussed here but admired it and sought to write in its tradition. Blake's poetics, for example, are illuminated not only by being read in relation to Young, whose *Night Thoughts* he illustrated, but also when read through Smart, whose sense of the inclusive divine body of Christ is reconfigured and humanized in the *Songs* and prophetic books. Perhaps the single-sheet engraving *The Laocoön* (1826) testifies most strongly to Blake's inheritance of eighteenth-century religious poetics and their consequent import for his poetic heirs (Roberts 2003). Recasting the Greek image in Hebraic terms, with Laocoön as King Jehovah and his sons as Adam and Satan, Blake overwrites the work with a series of axioms reminiscent not only of Smart, but of Dennis, Lowth, Addison, and Young: "A Poet, a Painter, a Musician, an Architect: the Man or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian. Prayer is the Study of Art. Praise is the Practise of Art. Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists. The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art."

See also chs. 3, "Poetry and Science"; 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 21, "Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno*"; 37, "The Sublime."

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5
Poetic Enthusiasm

John D. Morillo

Between the neglected poetic theory of John Dennis in 1701 and the celebrated poetic theory and practice of Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798, the paths of enthusiasm and poetry often intersect. Enthusiasm has recently become critically significant to our understanding of the relationship of Romantic to eighteenth-century literature, Augustan to midcentury poetry, and to many puzzles of how subjectivity, society, emotion, divinity, and language all function (Hawes 1996; Irlam 1999; Morillo 2001). In short, enthusiasm – literally "the god within," from the Greek *en-theos* – stood for a belief that people could be immediately connected to the divine, and could use this connection as a source of inspiration and power in speaking, writing, and acting. As the concept of enthusiasm enters the eighteenth century, however, it trails inglorious clouds of religious fanaticism and schism that are never wholly dispelled. Enthusiasm works as a discourse, a language through which any culture articulates fears and desires about itself and the world. As such, enthusiasm within and without poetry is best understood through its always vexed, often productive relations with other discourses, including religion, class, gender, medicine, and philosophy. Enthusiasm frequently engenders more modern kinds of social and political, often class, conflict, and is marked by ideology in its contradictions, by being alternately, sometimes simultaneously, reviled and celebrated.

By the end of the century, when Wordsworth memorably looks down on the clouds from his Pisgah perch on Mount Snowdon to see a "fabric more divine" in his own mind (*Prelude*, xiv. 456), his poetic journey parallels what the historian J. G. A. Pocock sees as the picaresque plot of enthusiasm over the eighteenth century: "the term enthusiasm begins its journey toward applicability to any system that presents the mind as of the same substance, spiritual and material, as the universe that it interprets, so that the mind becomes the universe thinking and obtains an authority derived from its identity with its subject matter" (Pocock 1998: 14). Wordsworth's rise from his own early enthusiastic forays into John Dennis's theories to his crowning example of the poetic sublime also epitomizes other recent cultural-historical accounts of a

movement throughout the long eighteenth century. Enthusiasm slowly shifts from being an ecclesiastical problem for priests and kings to alliance with aesthetic theory and the sublime (Morillo 2001; Irlam 1999). And whereas Wordsworth may have viewed his escape to such sublime enthusiasm as a staunchly English antidote to his youthful Francophile follies, a recent study suggests that in the eighteenth century those most likely to single out *poetic* enthusiasm as the only kind worth praise were not the English, but instead the French, who felt that the eighteenth-century English had clipped the very wings of the muse in their overzealous eradication of all enthusiasms, including poetic ones first made sacrosanct by Plato (Goldstein 1998: 48).

Well before Wordsworth's epiphany, and enthusiasm's boisterous eighteenth-century career as a virulent fighting word and conveniently elastic term of abuse, enthusiasm was identified as coextensive with poetic creation itself, and this overlap motivates later philosophical replies from Hobbes, Locke, Shaftesbury, and Addison on imagination. In *Phaedrus*, Plato's *enthusiasmos* was almost synonymous with *poein*, the ability to create a world with words. Poetic enthusiasm was for Plato a liminally divine force and a species of madness. By the eighteenth century, Shaftesbury's *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (1708) remarks of the ancients that "some Sects, such as the *Pythagorean* and latter *Platonick*, join'd in with the Superstition and Enthusiasm of the Times" (Shaftesbury 2001: 12). Enthusiasms ancient and modern were seen as both glorious and dangerous, political and poetic. Enthusiasm's powerful "god within," always capable of inspiring subjects and rattling governments, had established its characteristic Janus face.

Although disputes over enthusiasm heat up throughout Enlightenment Europe, its legacy in Britain is especially contested thanks to its historical relationship to the English Civil Wars (1641–60) and Protestant sectarianism. Consequently, modern studies of the importance of enthusiasm's simultaneously religious and political ideals to the artistic craft of writing verse in Britain typically begin in that period of unprecedented civil turmoil, when radical Protestants were transformed into architects of the first modern European state. Enthusiasm, whether seen as hero or villain, helped England to do the astonishing: to abolish both its hereditary monarchy and its state church.

Writing of the turbulent interregnum of the 1650s, Edmund Gibson, the Bishop of London, warned in *A Caution against Enthusiasm* (7th edn., 1755) with the certainty of historical hindsight that

> This Nation, in the Time of our Forefathers, had sufficient Experience of the Mischief and Contempt that may be brought upon Religion, by *inspired* Tongues and *itching* Ears . . . When the Bounds of Order and Discipline were broken down, and the settled Ministers and Offices of the Church depreciated and brought into Contempt, as Dispensations of a low and less spiritual Nature. (1755: 21–2)

Those who believed that such "inspired Tongues" could speak directly of and for God – no matter what their education or class – might have little need for priests or kings.

The god within easily became proof of what a new radical theocracy might do without. The particular threat to English episcopacy and Church authority was exacerbated by enthusiasm's perceived threat not only to monarchy, but also to property and class, as seen in one of the century's best-known poets.

Dryden and Locke

John Dryden's poetic dramatic allegory in *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) concerns the first Earl of Shaftesbury's role in the Exclusion Crisis of 1678–81, when Shaftesbury backed those who believed that Catholic monarchs must be excluded from the English throne. Dryden casts that crisis as a repetition of the graver religious crises of the English Civil Wars. The poem is rhetorically representative of its Restoration times, for it weaves together enthusiasm, faction, radical Protestantism, demagoguery, and threats to property and government. This passage is typical of that knot of concerns about any who "justified their spoils by inspiration" (l. 524):

> For who so fit for reign as Aaron's race,
> If once dominion they could found in grace?
> These led the pack; though not of surest scent,
> Yet deepest-mouthed against the government.
> A numerous host of dreaming saints succeed,
> Of the true old enthusiastic breed:
> 'Gainst form and order they their power employ,
> Nothing to build, and all things to destroy.
> (ll. 525–32)

The actions of these agents of chaos involve arts by which, Dryden warns, "the springs of property were bent, / And wound so high, they cracked the government" (ll. 499–500). Like the Leveler and Ranter actions they echo, Dryden's metaphors for demagogue enthusiasts ingeniously show how an invisible danger located by definition within individuals ("god within") was feared as a class threat to property, privilege, and even to language itself. Poetic enthusiasm always involved battles over interpretation and figurative language, as philosophers, clerics, and critics including Thomas Hobbes, Robert Lowth, John Locke, and Samuel Johnson all realized, and modern critics emphasize (Heyd 1995; Irlam 1999).

Dryden's own oscillation between supporting enthusiasm and decrying it demonstrates how one great poet of the long eighteenth century was shaped by varying beliefs about enthusiasm in his first and his best works alike. His first poem, "To John Hoddesdon on his *Divine Epigrams*" (1650), is marked by the turmoil of the interregnum. Young Dryden pays tribute to his early poetic mentor and Westminster schoolfriend by praising his religious verses on the Old and New Testaments. Here something very different from faction and demagoguery merges with

Hoddesdon's admirable enthusiasm. Admiring his "Mingling diviner streams with Helicon" (l. 20), his mixing theological with poetic inspiration, Dryden casts Hoddesdon as poetic prodigy and adds: "What may we hope, if thou goest on thus fast? / Scriptures at first, enthusiasms at last!" This *un*ironic line, from the poet who openly praised Cromwell in 1659, makes this obscure poem matter in our account, because it shows that many eighteenth-century poets hold multiple and changing opinions about enthusiasm, often divided between its religious and aesthetic voices. They typically need one species of it as a myth of artistic inspiration as much as they despise another as a threat to order and truth.

In Dryden's later return to enthusiasm as a positive force in his verse, he again distinguishes an artistic, aestheticized (though not entirely depoliticized) enthusiasm from other ranting forms of zeal. In *Alexander's Feast* (1697), the patron saint of music, Cecilia, is honored as a "sweet enthusiast" who invents the pipe organ and enlarges the mind and culture by merging the virtues of music and poetry. She, like Dryden's own work with English, "added length to solemn sounds, / With nature's mother-wit, and arts unknown before" (ll. 165–6). That such pipe organs were the privilege of established churches least likely to house other, more dangerous enthusiasts echoes Dryden's politics in *Absalom*. A transubstantiation of a religious enthusiasm into a poetic one, seen in Dryden's career, shapes the story of enthusiasm's lasting importance to eighteenth-century poets.

The voice coach of bad enthusiasms in Dryden's *Absalom*, Shaftesbury, was also the patron of John Locke, who famously criticized enthusiasm in the later seventeenth century. Locke's magisterial work of empiricism, the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), waits until quite late to make explicit the intellectual enemy of and impetus to his new philosophy. In the "Of Enthusiasm" chapter of the *Essay* (bk. 4, ch. 19) Locke assails enthusiasm in ways that promote nonpartisanship and secularism, but also have lasting implications for any poets who claim truth can ever come from poetry. In this chapter, Locke cautions that enthusiasm "takes away both Reason and Revelation, and substitutes in the room of it, the ungrounded Fancies of a Man's own Brain, and assumes them for a Foundation both of Opinion and Conduct" (Locke 1975: 698). Instead of leaving those it visits demigods, enthusiasm renders people less than suitable for civil society. Moreover, Locke adds, like Hobbes before him, we can spot enthusiasts by their peculiar language: "Similes so impose on them, that they serve them for certainty in themselves, and demonstration to others" (p. 700). Before Keats could claim beauty and truth for poetry, eighteenth-century poets had to reimagine the virtues of purely imaginative works of language and of the tropes and figures at the heart of them. Imagination had to be purified from any malignant associations with sectarian enthusiasm. No one worked harder to do so than playwright and critic John Dennis.

Dennis

Dennis, the most enthusiastic defender of enthusiasm, is only now resurfacing, so effectively was he laughed to scorn by Swift and Pope, and so resolutely stricken from

an eighteenth-century canon dominated by Augustanism and neoclassicism. However, Dennis deserves far better than ridicule, even if the truths he tests were anything but Lockean. Dennis concocts a heady alchemy of Plato's productive madness, Longinus' startling sublime, and Milton's claims to the Holy Ghost as personal muse in order to spirit poetry and Milton away from any damning fraternity with Commonwealth politics and the overzealous rule of the saints. The paradise lost in Milton is precisely what Dennis believes poetry inspired by the Holy Spirit can regain: spiritual harmony and calm. Nowhere is the theory of poetry more fully enthusiastic than in Dennis's aptly named *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701) and its sequel, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704). Good poetry, for Dennis, carries the true voice of a Christian God. It allows readers to be imaginatively restored to Eden and prelapsarian harmony with themselves and the world – if they will only heed God's voice crying out, not in the wilderness, but in all sublime poetry, whether ancient or modern. Enlisting the power of enthusiasm, Dennis shrewdly deploys enthusiastic poetry as an agent of the Protestant Reformation while downplaying its threats to order and propriety. In Dennis, a Low Church Anglican, we first see what might be called a rationalized or Anglicanized enthusiasm. His theory is fraught with fascinating complications born of his deeply divided allegiances to, on the one hand, the mysteries of revealed religion, and, on the other, the conviction of the New Science (Bacon, Newton) and modern philosophers (Descartes, Hobbes, Locke) that plain language is the path to understanding ultimate causes. No pure Anglican rationalist, Dennis thinks critically about religion, poetic language, and inspiration at an early-modern crossroads.

When Dennis redefines enthusiasm as a subset of *passion*, his enthusiasts become political *patients* rather than agents, let alone agitators. They are kept in passive, quietistic rapture by the voice of the god within. Dennis believes an infinitely powerful yet trustworthy God is literally in control of the hearts and minds of readers of enthusiastic poetry, be it found in the Old or New Testaments, Homer, Virgil, or Milton. Even though he claims that readers are struck by poetic enthusiasm with exactly the epiphanic force of Longinus' lightning bolts in *On the Sublime*, and that poets conveying these sentiments feel all of Plato's mythopoetic *furor brevis*, Dennis nonetheless believes that "enthusiastic passions," characteristic of the best verse, ensure that readers are *not* carried away to ungrounded fancies, tumults, and anarchy, but instead are transported to calm heavenly contemplation and spiritual inner peace:

> . . . and as the Reason rouzes and excites the Passions, the Passions, as it were, in a fiery Vehicle, transport the Reason above Mortality, which mounting, soars to the Heaven of Heavens, upon the Wings of those very Affections . . . and he who is entertain'd with an accomplish'd Poem, is, for a Time at least, restored to Paradise. That happy Man converses boldly with Immortal Beings. (Dennis 1943: vol. 1, 261, 264)

Dennis's doubled allusion to Ezekiel's and Plato's chariot metaphors implicitly turns a notably agitating prophet (as Blake recognized) into an emblem of quietism, especially when he shortly thereafter adds that such transported reason "further finds

its Account in the exact perpetual Observance of Decorums" (1943: vol. 1, 263). He characteristically Christianizes the classical, blending major currents of biblical and classical enthusiasm from the Old Testament and the *Phaedrus*, and ending with an equally hybrid version of Virgil's happy man (*O fortunatos*) who lives not in the country but in a private, mental heaven. Like those who followed his lead closely, including Addison in *The Spectator*'s "Pleasures of Imagination" series and Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, Dennis rehabilitates enthusiasm as a new universal standard of poetic taste and the exemplary agent of personal and social happiness (Irlam 1999; Morillo 2001).

Dennis's careful reappropriation of enthusiasm for genteel Christian poets and their readers mines the rich veins of poetic value in ecstasy: if readers could be carried out of themselves by gorgeous words, he believes, they could be carried toward truth and God. Although Dennis, like all other theorists of enthusiasm, does not fully succeed in avoiding enthusiasm's leveling ties to radical individualism, he is instrumental in divorcing Milton and an ideal of divine inspiration from Cromwell and the Civil Wars. Unfortunately for Dennis, his prose was no divine voice of power and has gone largely unheard. Most have listened instead to the so-called "Tory satirists" who vehemently and brilliantly applied a favorite antidote to poetic enthusiasm.

Shaftesbury, Swift, and Astell

Ridicule, taught the third Earl of Shaftesbury in *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (1708), was the best test of truth, and its cousin satire was the natural nemesis of enthusiasm: "Good HUMOUR is not only the best Security against *Enthusiasm*, but the best Foundation of *Piety* and true *Religion*" (2001: 15). Cutting humor was indeed the favored response by early eighteenth-century poets to enthusiasm and its defenders. Most satiric anti-enthusiasts, however, are best surveyed as a group; only gradually did certain of their number emerge to show interesting variation on the subject of divine voices and inspirations.

Swift is the fiery Jeremiah of the anti-enthusiasts. Unlike his kinsman Dryden, whom he scorned as a temporizer, Swift in his first poem sets enthusiasm in a representational mold never to be broken in his career. In "Ode to the Athenian Society" (1692), the New Science championed by that club, born of plain speaking and clear definitions, countervails enthusiasm, represented by Swift as one of many malignant forms of Proteus, the changeling god. This "surly, slippery god" (l. 197) appears in the guise of "madmen and the wits, philosophers and fools, / With all that factious or enthusiastic dotards dream" (ll. 203–4). Proteus, emblem of multiplied meanings, can "contrive to shock your minds, with many a senseless doubt" (l. 207). Enthusiasts are dotards, fools, and dupes; and such remains Swift's view in his later brilliant examination of reading, interpretation, and knowledge, *A Tale of a Tub* (1704). In his thoroughly unapologetic *Apology to A Tale of a Tub*, enthusiasts epitomize all "numerous and gross corruptions in Religion" (Swift 1986: 2). Enthusiasts figure prominently in the *Tub* itself as chief mechanics cranking up all mechanical operations of the spirit.

They are exposed as windbag charlatans of the first order. The idea of the spirit within changes from a divine light in the mind, a typical metaphor for enthusiasm, or the breath of heaven, into just so much noxious gas released in one giant belch.

Swift is hardly alone in making enthusiasm's invisible threats visible on the body as a medical condition. Shaftesbury seconds Swift most closely when he explains how the contagion of enthusiasm sends a panic through religion:

> And in this state their very Looks are infectious. The Fury flies from Face to Face: and the Disease is no sooner seen than caught. . . . And thus is Religion also *Pannick*; when Enthusiasm of any kind gets up; as oft, on melancholy occasions, it will do. For Vapors naturally rise; and in bad times especially, when the Spirits of Men are low. (Shaftesbury 2001: 11)

Like Shaftesbury here and Dryden earlier, Swift makes a metaphor literal. Despite seeming to side with the ancients, he enlists the linguistic techniques of moderns like Hobbes to deflate the pretensions of enthusiasm as empty language and ridiculous posturing. Enthusiasm can never be a friend of poetry when it names, for Swift, a deadly threat to health, comprehensibility, plain speaking, and good sense.

Swift shows the interdependence in the early eighteenth century of the dominant aesthetic – the rational Augustanism of the Tory satirists – with an emergent one of poetic enthusiasm. His crusade for propriety in interpretation is driven by the legacy of enthusiasm as a language- and world-altering power *not* easily laughed away. The purported voice of God will necessarily be one that differs most markedly from ordinary language, and poetic language will shift away from Hobbes and toward allegory once enthusiasm dominates poetic taste (Irlam 1999).

Swift's "Mechanical Operation of the Spirit" section of *A Tale of a Tub* also shows how readily women, prone to being seen as creatures of questionable reason, figured in the purported evils of enthusiasm: "All Females are attracted by Visionary or Enthusiastick Preachers" (Swift 1986: 141). Similarly a real preacher, Archibald Campbell, claimed in *A Discourse Proving that the Apostles were no Enthusiasts* (1730), his Anglican defense of the "manly principles of Reason and Religion," that even in the face of Christ's resurrection the Apostles were no enthusiasts: "had there been any degree of Enthusiasm . . . among the disciples, it would have certainly broken out among those fond, silly women who went first to the Sepulchre" (Campbell 1730: 8, 66).

Women writers contemporary with Swift, however, begged to differ. They were often just as wary as their critics of any claims to gods within, and embraced Shaftesbury's method, sometimes turning it against Shaftesbury himself. Mary Astell's *Bart'lemy Fair* (1709), a direct response to Shaftesbury's *Letter*, drew its title from Shaftesbury's noticing that Huguenots, "these prophesying Enthusiasts" (Shaftesbury 2001: vol. 1, 18), in the purported grip of God looked like jerky puppets on strings and were thus represented as such in satiric puppet shows at Bartholomew (Bart'lemy) Fair. Astell aims to defend the Church and the True (Anglican) Religion while offering no quarter to enthusiasm. For her, Shaftesbury had unwittingly moved

enthusiasm from the cultural margins to the center: "he represents the greatest Men, *Heroes, Statesmen, Poets, Orators, and even Philosophers themselves*, as Enthusiasts, who, as he elsewhere explains himself, are no better than *Madmen*!" (Astell 1709: 27). This is insupportable, because it implies that "Religion, which has hitherto been venerated by Humane Nature, by the Wisest and Greatest Nations, and the most Excellent Persons among them, he wou'd have to be no better than a *Bart'lemy-Fair* business" (pp. 27–8). Vital to her critique and to her importance to our account are not only her adamant refusal of the weak-willed, enthusiasm-inclined female position Swift assumed women occupied, but her notice of the crucial issue about enthusiasm for the rest of the century: whether it *could* be separable from religious fanaticism. She spots a critical inconsistency in Shaftesbury's need to enfranchise poetic enthusiasm but banish its unwelcome cousins: "there is a *Noble Enthusiasm*, which is *the Spirit* the Philosopher *allots to Heroes* . . . And yet as *Natural* as *Enthusiasm* is in one Page, we are told in another, that it is a *Distemper*!" (p. 172). Precisely this double gesture shapes the contributions of one of the century's finest poets, Alexander Pope, to the career of enthusiasm in eighteenth-century poetry. Pope, despite openly rejecting Dennis with Shaftesburian ridicule, nonetheless intimates just how an aestheticized *poetic* enthusiasm begins to find new fans capable of rejecting his own and his friend Swift's dominant standard of taste.

Pope

In *The Dunciad* (1742 edn.) Pope predictably includes Dennis, whom he, Swift, and Gay had already lambasted in *Three Hours After Marriage* as "Sir Tremendous Longinus," in the court of fools. Pope also continues Swift's assault on corrupt spirits. Enthusiasts in this poem are literally asses, and where Pope's mentor Dryden had imagined the patron saint of music as a good enthusiast, Pope's epic about language gone wrong uses music deformed into noise to inveigh against enthusiasm's Swiftian corruption of language:

> Ass intones to Ass,
> Harmonic twang! of leather, horn, and brass;
> Such as from lab'ring lungs th' Enthusiast blows,
> High Sound, attemp'red to the vocal nose
> Or such as bellow from the deep Divine.
> (ii. 253–7)

Unlike Swift's unrelenting, career-long attack, however, Pope's treatment of enthusiasm is gradually modulated. In *The Dunciad*'s note to his earlier unprovoked attack on Dennis in the *Essay on Criticism* (1711), Pope glosses his jibe that "all the Mighty Mad in Dennis rage" with tongue firmly in cheek:

> This is by no means to be understood literally, as if Mr. Dennis were really mad . . . No – it is spoken of that *Excellent* and *Divine Madness*, so often mention'd by Plato; that poetical rage and enthusiasm, with which Mr. D. hath, in his time, been highly possessed; and of those *extraordinary hints and motions* whereof he himself so feelingly treats. (i. 106n.)

That Pope may have indicted only Dennis's cheap brand of *furor brevis* rather than all enthusiasms first becomes clear in his translations of Homer. Even though Pope's verse here and elsewhere rarely features the term "enthusiasm," in his prose notes to his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* translations it appears more prominently, and increasingly positively, quietly offering a significant aesthetic counterpoint. From the ruins of the wall of Troy this positive poetic enthusiasm first cautiously emerges in Pope's nod to Homer's genius: "This whole Episode of the Destruction of the Wall is spoken as a kind of Prophecy, where *Homer* in a poetical Enthusiasm relates what was to happen in future Ages" (*Iliad*, xii. 15n.). Although Pope's tone here remains circumspect, his further notes continue to carefully nudge poetic enthusiasm away from religious fanaticism and toward admirable poetic genius. Most surprisingly, in so doing Pope even starts to sound a good deal like Dennis:

> But Homer . . . has gone into the *Marvellous*, given a prodigious and supernatural Prospect, and brought down *Jupiter* himself, array'd in all his Terrors, to discharge his Lightnings and Thunders on *Typhœus*. The Poet breaks out into this Description with an Air of Enthusiasm, which greatly heightens the Image in general, while it seems to transport him beyond the Limits of an exact Comparison. And this daring manner is particular to our Author above all the Ancients, and to *Milton* above all the Moderns. (*Iliad*, ii. 950n.)

Nor is this the only time Pope echoes both Dennis and Addison in recognizing a poetic genius in Milton inseparable from some notion of enthusiasm. Comparing Milton's war in Heaven in *Paradise Lost* (bk. 6) favorably with Homer's and Hesiod's battles of gods – no small compliment – Pope attributes Milton's success to a kind of enthusiasm, but with a careful neoclassical twist to realign Milton with the classical canon: "The Elevation, and Enthusiasm of our great Countryman seems owing to this Original [Hesiod]" (*Iliad*, xx. 75n.). Pope deftly implies that whatever we call enthusiasm in Milton's poetry was as likely the result of his reading Hesiod and other ancient Greeks as any direct conversation with the Holy Ghost. Saving Milton from Cromwell and for poetry became a central gambit in the rehabilitation of enthusiasm as a poetic value (Griffin 1986). If Pope here seeks to re-evaluate the cause of poetic enthusiasm in order to preserve its effects, he elsewhere remained engaged in a philosophical debate over causes central to Dennis's poetic theory of enthusiastic passion's divine source. In notes to the *Odyssey* on whether Minerva controlled Odysseus, Pope offers this measured appraisal of enthusiasm, causation, and agency:

> But then is it not a derogation to Ulysses, to think nothing but what the Goddess dictates? and a restraint of human liberty, to act solely by the impulse of a Deity?
>
> . . . these influences do not make the action involuntary, but only give a beginning to spontaneous operations; for we must either remove God from all manner of causality, or confess that he invisibly assists us by a secret co-operation. . . . in actions unaccountably daring, of a transcendent nature, there they are said to be carry'd away by a divine impulse or enthusiasm, and it is no longer human reason, but a God that influences the soul. (vii. 433n.)

Pope draws equally on modern philosophy and ancient texts to revisit one of Milton's and Dennis's central problems, to realign enthusiasm with free will.

Pope's attitude toward enthusiasm, more like Dryden's than Swift's, continues to waver as his own deeper allegiance to Locke rather than Longinus casts skeptical doubts over the Oracle of Delphi as any historical proof of enthusiastic powers: "I look upon the whole Business as of human Contrivance; an egregious Imposture founded upon Superstition, and carry'd on by Policy and Interest, till the brighter Oracles of the holy Scriptures dispell'd these Mists of Error and Enthusiasm" (*Iliad*, xvi. 285n.). As Pope returns to his usual intellectual center of gravity, enthusiasm reverts to a synonym for all blinding clouds of error in *The Dunciad*, and the Bible becomes an antidote to, not proof of, enthusiasm. This latter point was no mere quibble: the century produced many pamphlets – like Richard Graves's *An Essay on the Character of the Apostles* (1798) – insisting that the Apostles, though indeed directly inspired by God, were yet no enthusiasts. Though appearing only as if against Pope's better judgment, his acknowledgment of a positive, poetic enthusiasm seen as daring genius effloresced into the enthusiastic-poetic style of midcentury poets like James Thomson, Mark Akenside, and Edward Young, whose taste for the enthusiastic sublime would owe no small debt to Dennis, and culminated in a critically important Romantic rejection of Augustan tastes (Irlam 1999). These poets would discover how close the sublime powers of imagination in poetic enthusiasm can come to a hubristic challenge to God's creation. They struggled, well before Blake, with the dangers of relying on an unintelligible and isolating private language between poet and God, and braved a descent into just the kinds of verbal–mental madness Swift and Pope had decried.

Midcentury Translations

Reading and translating classical languages plays a significant role in the midcentury's rehabilitation of enthusiasm for poetry. Poetic enthusiasm is never a fully separable counter-aesthetic to neoclassicism, because the positive valences of divine inspiration often remained more acceptable in ancient than modern garb. In the decades after Pope's death in 1744, Christopher Pitt and James Beattie both defended a properly *poetic* enthusiasm in their translations of Virgil. Pitt's rendering of the *Aeneid* (1753) puts Virgil's beauties in the context of Lucretius and Catullus, and remarks of the

latter that his portrait of "Atys a priest of Cybele struck with madness by this goddess, abounds with some of the strongest strokes of passion, and true poetic enthusiasm, of any thing the Roman poesy has left us" (ii. 900n.). This alignment of a poetic with a "true" enthusiasm reappears in Beattie's notes to his translation of Virgil's Eclogue 4 (1760), a favorite poem for those seeking evidence of noble heathens, classical writers with proto-Christian attitudes. Whether or not Virgil's boy savior is plausibly anything more than Soloninus, son of Pollio, Virgil's panegyric to him matters most for the "spirit of prophetic enthusiasm that breathes through it" (l. 1n.). Connecting enthusiasm, poetry, and prophecy, Beattie would be seconded by many poets of the later eighteenth century who gradually weaned themselves from Homer and Virgil and foiled Pope's strategy of marrying enthusiasm to the classical canon. Throughout the eighteenth century, a poetic enthusiasm struggled to separate itself from religion and politics in an ongoing battle of men and gods.

Byrom and Jerningham: Two Poems Named "Enthusiasm"

By the midcentury, then, enthusiasm could be more openly acknowledged as a praiseworthy force. Having been thoroughly and pejoratively associated with radical Protestantism in the 1650s, by the 1750s it boasted some more interesting defenders who were now either Catholic or allied with Catholic causes. John Byrom, better known as a composer of hymns than a poet, was a friend of the Wesleys but also a suspected Jacobite, one sympathetic to the Catholic House of Stuart's continuing claim to the crown. He makes especially clear enthusiasm's place in the changing tastes of midcentury poets. In *Enthusiasm; A Poetical Essay. In a Letter to a Friend in Town* (1751), Byrom banks on his readers associating the witty, Augustan style of satiric epistles in heroic verse with staunch anti-enthusiasm, as in Swift. However, in high Augustan ironic–satiric style Byrom instead ridicules those who habitually ridiculed enthusiasm:

> Fly from *Enthusiasm*! It is the Pest,
> Bane, Poison, Frenzy, Fury, – and the rest.
> This is the Cry that oft, when Truth appears,
> Forbids Attention to our list'ning Ears.
> (ll. 1–4)

Enthusiasm is philosophically rehabilitated in Byrom as an indispensable force of the will; it names our strongest desires. As "Thought enkindled to a high Degree" (l. 76) it not only should not but *cannot* be eradicated without destroying mind and soul alike. Further, by associating it with "high Degree" Byrom recognizes the continuing need to allay fears that enthusiasm can disrupt class stratifications. He also explicitly claims what is left implicit in much writing about enthusiasm of the later eighteenth century, that it is never solely a religious issue: "When to Religion we

confine the Word, / What Use of Language can be more absurd?" (ll. 81–2). Returning to Swift's and Pope's great theme of abuse of language and threat to meaning, Byrom turns against Augustan aesthetic foundations. He also anticipates a great issue about the French Revolution's effect on the object of enthusiasm (Pocock 1989). Byrom notes before Edmund Burke that a most dangerous enthusiasm can be seen in any overzealous embrace of reason: "To his own Reason loudly he appeals, – / No Saint more zealous for what God reveals!" (ll. 223–4).

Whereas enthusiasm's fire was perhaps watered down by Byrom into faculty psychology, it was stoked and celebrated as a political force in the same year that the Augustanism of its staunch enemies met its greatest poetic challenge. Nine years before Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads*, Edward Jerningham wrote his own coda to a century of poetic enthusiasm by showing that, several generations after Cromwell, enthusiasm had evolved by gradual mutations into something a Catholic poet no longer feared as an inherently Protestant, radical spirit of religious, civil, and class warfare. Jerningham instead championed it as the voice of freedom and empire alike. *Enthusiasm: a Poem, in Two Parts* (1789) reveals in its style and structure how writers still drew from Milton and Pope the most important, and most polarized, attitudes toward enthusiasm in English poetry. In his often bizarre coupling of Ariel's speeches to the sylphs in Pope's *Rape of the Lock* with Milton's Satanic debate in *Paradise Lost*, Jerningham's heroic couplets rehearse two centuries of debate over enthusiasm. By 1789 the god within has become a "Daughter of Energy" (l. 25) presiding in a strangely polytheistic heaven over a debate about whether her rule has been vicious or virtuous. As alternate seraphs attack or defend her, the poem plays out all of the important issues over enthusiasm and poetry. Queen enthusiasm's energy and fiery force of rhetoric reveal Longinus' *energeia* and the theory of sublime language that Dennis had most directly and influentially connected to enthusiasm. When we learn that her inveterate enemy is "the blast of satire" (l. 41) we see the noted antipathy between Augustan and more enthusiastic, sublime aesthetics. In Jerningham's odd Miltonic–Popean style we can now recognize the century's great desire to shift an enthusiasm too close to Cromwell toward one so purified of radical Protestantism that even Catholics championing religious toleration can be its new allies. So pronounced is this latter move that Jerningham includes a lengthy, sympathetic portrait of the exiled French Protestant Huguenots, the very group ridiculed by Shaftesbury; and he includes other historical and political effects of enthusiasm, both good and ill. Enthusiasm, acting much like Byrom's view of it as force of will, is by turns a Swiftian spirit of language-killing power that inspired the Muslim Omar to burn the library at Alexandria, then also the energy that resists all tyrants, inspires Martin Luther to reform religion, and even urges Columbus to explore new worlds. It overtly sides both with empire, becoming what inspires the British to take Gibraltar from Spain, and with the greatest challenge mounted to that empire: for the youngest and greatest son of the goddess enthusiasm is America, that great radical Protestant political experiment. In Jerningham's claim that "Americanus" was "at the font of Energy baptized"

(ll. 260–2) we see how poetic enthusiasm retained its political charge while altering its position on the political spectrum quite remarkably.

Postscript: Blake

A famous poetic defender of America's fiery freedoms, Blake unapologetically represented the *revolutionary* flames of enthusiasm and preserved the legacy of poetic enthusiasm for nineteenth-century poetry. Blake restored enthusiasm to the very state eighteenth-century British poets had worked so hard to alter (Mee 1992). Professed interlocutor with angels and idiosyncratic champion of his god within, Blake would associate enthusiasm directly with political revolution in *America: A Prophecy* (1793), and again in the dedication to *Jerusalem* (1804). He offers therein a most fitting final tribute to the importance of poetic enthusiasm throughout the prior century and beyond:

> The Enthusiasm of the following Poem, the Author hopes no Reader will think presumptuousness or arroganc[e] when he is reminded that the Ancients entrusted their love to their Writing, to the full as Enthusiastically as I have who Acknowledge mine for my Saviour and Lord, for they were wholly absorb'd in their Gods. (plate 3)

See also chs. 4, "Poetry and Religion"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics"; 34, "Augustanism and Pre-Romanticism"; 37, "The Sublime."

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6

Poetry and the Visual Arts

Robert Jones

The best place to begin an analysis of the relationship between eighteenth-century poetry and the visual arts is where the poets would have begun it: with Horace. In his *Ars Poetica* the Roman critic made an analogy between the arts of poetry and painting, writing famously: "*ut pictura poesis*." Horace may be translated thus: "as is painting, so is poetry." From the Renaissance onward Horace's comparison was interpreted (regardless of his original intention) as meaning that painting and poetry had the same end and, accordingly, deserved the same dignity, so: "as is poetry, so is painting." This view was elaborated by humanist art theorists such as Leon Battista Alberti and the Abbé du Bos, who claimed that – if properly undertaken – both arts could, because they articulated ideas derived from history and scripture, give instruction as well as pleasure. Aristotle's argument, in the *Poetics*, that the highest purpose of art was to show human nature in action also supported this claim, as did his suggestion that design in painting was much like plot in tragedy (again, the precise point of the classical analogy was largely forgotten in order to appreciate the wider point of comparison). The claim could be confirmed by other classical references such as Simonides' observation, recorded by Plutarch, that painting is mute poetry and that poetry is a speaking picture. Relying on these classical references, art and literary theorists argued that poetry and painting were united by their shared capacity to express the highest endeavors of the human mind, regardless of their differences of medium. This attitude would change during the course of the eighteenth century, especially as the influence of Longinus grew in English critical writing; however, its importance at the beginning of the century cannot be overestimated (Lee 1940: 197–202; Hagstrum 1958: 3–36).

The connection proposed by humanist criticism between painting and poetry had received considerable new impetus at the close of the seventeenth century with the publication of Charles du Fresnoy's ambitious poem *De Arte Graphica*, first in Latin and then in a French translation by Roger de Piles. Du Fresnoy's poem built upon the slender foundations provided by Horace to argue for a close relation between

poetry and painting, stressing the superlative qualities of both arts, but principally defending painting from the insinuation, hurtful to its practitioners, that it was a merely mechanical art. John Dryden translated the work into English prose in 1695, after some encouragement from the painter Sir Godfrey Kneller. Dryden's translation begins:

> Painting and Poesy are two Sisters, which are so like in all things, that they mutually lend to each other both their Name and Office. One is call'd a dumb Poesy, and the other a speaking Picture. The Poets have never said any thing but what they believ'd would please the Ears. And it has been the constant endeavour of the Painters to give pleasure to the Eyes. In short, those things which the Poets have thought unworthy of their Pens, the Painters have judg'd to be unworthy of their pencils. (Dryden 1989: 84)

There would be better, more dynamic translations by the end of the century, but Dryden's words captured something of the sympathy that was meant to exist between the arts of poetry and painting (see Lipking 1970: 38–65). It is easy to see why painters appreciated the Horatian argument, especially as Dryden also suggested that a painter's use of color was comparable to a poet's use of words (Dryden 1989: 50, 75–7). Why poets should be gratified by the argument is less immediately obvious. By the end of the seventeenth century they did not need to make claims for poetry's status as an art capable of delivering historical and moral truths. Nor did poets need to claim that their art could produce powerful images of the sublime or the beautiful. Yet throughout the eighteenth century poets wrote verses addressed to prominent painters (to Kneller at the beginning of the period, then to Charles Jervas, and later to Sir Joshua Reynolds) that acknowledged their investment in the idea that poetry and painting were fundamentally similar or suggested a real competition between the arts, one that could be argued from both sides. This essay will argue that this sometimes heated discussion is best understood in terms of a larger debate about the extent to which the value and requirements of form should predominate over the possibilities of the imagination. It is a debate that reveals much about the complex interplay between poetry and painting in Georgian Britain.

To understand how this debate arose, why poets became intrigued by comparisons (favorable or otherwise) with the work of painters, and why they would wish to see their art in relation to those working with brush or knife upon canvas, requires a specific understanding of the intersection of theories of taste, culture, and science at the beginning of the century. One key factor was the sudden rise in the status of the arts in Britain at the start of the eighteenth century. Around 1700 educated Britons became increasingly interested in the art of painting, and treatises began to be published that explained its methods and redefined its ambitions. Jonathan Richardson, himself a noted reader of Milton, argued decisively for the dignity and significance of painting as an intellectual pursuit, as did George Turnbull (see Pears 1988; Solkin 1993). French critical thought was also influential. Heavily indebted to the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*, French academy thinking – exemplified by Du Bos, Du Fresnoy,

and De Piles – sought to establish the dignity of the arts by arguing that painting should instruct the viewer morally by representing only the most significant moments from history and literature. In this way painting, like poetry, was given a rhetorical and persuasive function. This moral purpose demanded a clear emphasis on form and decorum. Given the high expectations placed upon the arts, it was not enough merely to copy nature. Painterly images were to be derived from nature, to be sure, but only after a proper selection and arrangement had been made: imitation was to be ideal; nature was to be modified, made decorous. This agenda was given life by the work of Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorraine (Lee 1940: 203–9, 226–8).

Some of these ideas, with changes of emphasis and direction, were to find their way into British theories of both art and poetry, including those of Pope and Reynolds, who are discussed later in the essay. However, it is also possible to detect the influence of French ideas in the work of the Scottish poet James Thomson, who probably knew the work of the French theorists well (Hagstrum 1958: 244, 257–8). Certainly his writing shows the influence of Claude, whose work was highly prized in Britain. Claude's landscapes are highly organized and represent distance, not by vanishing-point perspective, but via an arrangement of bands of light and shade that recede from the viewer's gaze: first foreground, then brightly lit middle grounds, and finally darker backgrounds, perhaps revealing brooding hills. This arrangement of the landscape has the advantage of allowing the painter to shape the countryside in ways that stress certain features or privilege certain ways of looking; but it also has the effect of making the landscape highly formal and to a degree predictable. Thomson frequently translates this powerful device into verse (Barrell 1986: 100–36). In his poem "Spring," first published in 1728, he depicts his patron Lord Lyttelton reaching some high ground on his Worcestershire estate:

> Meantime, you gain the Height, from whose fair Brow
> The bursting Prospect spreads immense around;
> And snatch'd o'er Hill and Dale, and Wood and Lawn,
> The verdant Field, and darkening Heath between,
> And Villages embosom'd soft in Trees,
> And spiry Towns by surging Columns mark'd
> Of household Smoak, your Eye excursive roams:
> Wide-stretching from the *Hall*, in whose kind Haunt
> The *Hospitable Genius* lingers still,
> To where the broken Landskip, by Degrees,
> Ascending roughens into rigid Hills;
> O'er which the *Cambrian* Mountains, like far Clouds
> That skirt the blue Horizon, dusky, rise.
>
> (ll. 950–62)

Thomson uses his syntax to recreate the view in ways that imitate the bands that characterize a Claudian landscape. Crucially, Lyttelton's house – the seat of hospitality and good sense – is placed at the center of the image, its significance underlined by

the painterly organization of the verse. However, Thomson steps outside the French tradition as he unfolds the meaning and purpose of this partially borrowed image. He does not expect Lyttelton simply to see this view or to be impressed merely with its beauties, structure, or refinement. Lyttelton, he hopes, will understand the beauty of nature as a call to public duty and to civic renewal. He should plan with a mind "unwarped by Party-Rage, / BRITANNIA's weal" (ll. 929–30). In this respect Thomson differs from his French predecessors and locates himself more squarely in the British civic humanist tradition associated with the Earl of Shaftesbury and the poet Mark Akenside (Barrell 1986: 39–45).

If the increasingly ambitious claims made for painting were one influence upon Thomson and his contemporaries, then philosophy and science were equally informative. Of primary importance in this context is the philosopher John Locke. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) Locke argued that the human mind contained no ideas without first receiving impressions from the senses. According to Locke, humans were not born with minds already filled with notions of sweetness, smoothness, volume, or beauty but rather formed them as they encountered the world about them. Locke's conjecture coincided with Isaac Newton's researches on sight, published as *Opticks*: *or, a Treatise of the Reflexions, Refractions, Inflexions and Colours of Light* in 1704. Newton suggested a fresh and compelling idea of what seeing involved and what light was. Crucially, these new ways of thinking privileged not just the senses above innate ideas but the sense of sight, the sense that is peculiarly the province of the painter's art.

The possibilities represented by this new focus on vision are powerfully realized in the work of Thomson, whose poetry revels in the effects of vision on the sensitive mind. Here he describes the beauties of the sky:

> Meantime, refracted from yon eastern Cloud,
> Bestriding Earth, the grand ethereal Bow
> Shoots up immense; and every Hue unfolds,
> In fair Proportion running from the Red
> To where the Violet fades into the Sky.
> Here, awful NEWTON, the dissolving Clouds
> Form, fronting on the Sun, thy showery Prism;
> And to the sage-instructed Eye unfold
> The various Twine of Light, by thee disclosed
> From the white mingling Maze.
> ("Spring," ll. 202–11)

Newton provides the idea and the language (light is "refracted", a "prism" yields a rainbow), but Thomson's verse succeeds because he makes his image simultaneously painterly and poetic. As in the passage discussed above, the view of the clouds and their colors is highly organized: views and distances, shapes and colors are stressed to underscore a more essential harmony. Throughout the poem the act of looking at a munificent Nature is the central idea within a poetics increasingly based on the

pleasures of vision. Thomson's literary pictorialism therefore unites many influences, including British and French art theory alongside powerful new scientific ideas.

Science, philosophy, and criticism came together in the first decades of the century in ways that offered poets new opportunities and set them fresh challenges relative to the visual arts. The impact of this new understanding of sight can be found in the elegant pages of *The Spectator*, where Joseph Addison used it to initiate the discourse of polite taste: "Our Sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our Senses. It fills the Mind with the largest variety of Ideas converses with its Objects at the greatest Distance, and continues the longest in Action without being tired or satiated with its proper Enjoyments." "It is this Sense," argues Addison, "which furnishes the imagination with its Ideas." It is sight that allows the "Man of Polite Imagination" to "converse with a Picture, and find an agreeable Companion in a Statue" (*Spectator*, no. 411, June 21, 1712). For Addison sight is a refined sense, yielding discreet pleasures to the cultivated. Although he accepts that the human mind, once it has received sufficient data, can assemble and reassemble images so as to produce an infinite variety of ideas (such is the capacity of the imagination), Addison retains an appreciation of how sight can impact directly on the consciousness of the viewer. This gives painting an advantage over poetic descriptions of the same scene: "for a Picture has a real Resemblance to its Original, which Letters and Syllables are wholly void of. Colours speak all Languages, but Words are understood only by such a People or Nation." In Addison's account of the imagination, however, sight falls into the category of primary pleasures, while words gain their final superiority by acting upon the higher secondary pleasures of the imagination: "Words, when well chosen, have so great a Force in them, that a Description often gives us more lively Ideas than the Sight of Things themselves" (*Spectator*, no. 416, June 27, 1712). Although Addison gives painting a subordinate role here, making it less elevated than poetry, which appeals to the mind alone, the polarity was reversed in some eighteenth-century poetry, including Addison's own.

The combination of Locke and Newton was to revolutionize poetry and the relationship between the arts, a process aided by Dryden's translation of Du Fresnoy and the work of Addison and others in founding a new critical language. This critical project was often sympathetic to the interplay between the two art forms. Accordingly, references to the visual arts can be found in the works of a great many eighteenth-century poets. Poets sometimes appear to borrow from visual artists, taking a lead from their example or praising their works through ekphrasis. Derived from the Greek word for description, ekphrasis is the pictorial depiction in poetry of an object (usually, but not exclusively, another art object). This can take the form of specific praise or censure, though it can also be used as the basis for reflections upon the state of culture more generally. The poem Addison addressed to Kneller in 1716 is a case in point. Addison praises the painter for his portrait of George I (recently and controversially installed on the British throne), thereby making his poem political, especially as the image was intended to stand as a model for new coinage. However, although Addison's poem owes something to his Whiggish politics, it is more

forcefully about the superlative qualities of Kneller's art, which, according to Addison, rivals that of the ancient artist Phidias ("To Sir Godfrey Kneller," ll. 55, 81–2). This appreciation is most evident when Addison praises Kneller for the precisely pictorial elements of his art:

> The magic of thy art calls forth
> His secret soul and hidden worth,
> His probity and mildness shows,
> His care of friends and scorn of foes
> In every stroke in every line,
> Does some exalted virtue shine,
> And Albion's happiness we trace
> Through all the features of his face.
> (ll. 7–14)

The magic of Kneller's art lies in its ability to show instantly and simultaneously a private image of the king and an icon of the nation: "In all the force of light and shade / And awed by thy delusive hand / As in the presence-chamber stand" (ll. 4–6). Crucially, Kneller's image is thought by Addison to do these things immediately, seizing its viewers, cementing their allegiance through the power of art: "And crowds grow loyal as they gaze" (l. 22). It is for this reason, Addison claims, that British monarchs have often sought the aid of Kneller's pencil (ll. 33–40). To praise a painting for its likely instantaneous and ideological effect is to recommend precisely its qualities as a work of visual art (and its effectiveness as propaganda). Poetry, as Addison's lines themselves show, cannot do this. The instantaneous ideological effect of an image cannot be achieved in poetry, which must build its effects up with words over time.

Addison's poem recognizes the challenge painting offered to poetry throughout the eighteenth century, when it was accepted that painters worked in a medium in which colors could add vibrancy and interest to their designs. Their art, furthermore, was one of powerful synchronic effects. Poets would have to work harder if they wanted their readers to "see" the images they wished to convey. Addison understands this but avoids the challenge, merely acknowledging it. By contrast, more outwardly ambitious poets, such as Thomson, felt liberated by the encounter between poetry and the possibilities of vision. The colors, tones, and shades of the painter's art gave poets fresh ways of expressing their concerns. Literary pictorialism extended their art, offering them new topics and ways of seeing. This is most obviously the case in Thomson's wonderful description of the "Unbounded Beauty" of nature ("Spring," l. 507). But in *The Seasons* Thomson also begins to explore his own imagination and hints at the limits of the painter's vision. Throughout his long and digressive poem he shifts easily between natural description, poetic reverie, and philosophical reflection in ways that reveal that although poetry fires the imagination less immediately than painting, it may do so more extensively. Moreover, as *The Seasons* also demonstrates, poetry is not

static, but rather a diachronic medium, one that is able, with sequences of sound and image, to build complex narratives as well as vivid scenes. In this respect poetry could surpass painting. Throughout the eighteenth century poets would be inspired by the visual arts, even if that inspiration was to encourage them to aim not just to emulate but to exceed their contemporaries. It is possible to see poets such as Thomas Gray ("Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" and *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*) and Anna Laetitia Barbauld ("A Summer Evening's Meditation") as working within precisely this dynamic. Moreover, while poets gained from painters they were also suspicious, querying painting's reliance on imitation, convention, and deception (Hagstrum 1958: 243–67).

Pope's verse epistle "To Mr Jervas, with Dryden's Translation of Fresnoy's Art of Painting" (1715) engages in this debate, the poet offering both praise and gentle rebuke to his fellow artist. Curiously, Pope spent perhaps a year and a half working in Jervas's studio just as he was completing *Windsor-Forest*, and seems to have found the atmosphere of the artist's world congenial, finding work in paint almost as inspiring as that with a pen. One critic has even suggested that Pope's interest in color, detectable in some of the vivid descriptions of *Windsor-Forest* (the wonderfully plumed pheasant, for example) reveals a debt to these months spent working with paint (ll. 111–18). The specific purpose of Pope's verse, however, was to accompany a copy of Dryden's translation of Du Fresnoy. For Pope, the combination of Dryden's "native fire" with "*Fresnoy*'s close art" gives him a model both for his own friendship with Jervas and for the relationship between the arts:

> Smit with the love of Sister-arts we came,
> And met congenial, mingling flame with flame;
> Like friendly colours found them both unite,
> And each from each contract new strength and light.
> How oft' in pleasing tasks we wear the day,
> While summer suns roll unperceiv'd away?
> How oft' our slowly-growing works impart,
> While images reflect from art to art.
>
> (ll. 13–20)

Pope tells Jervas that they have both gained delight and inspiration from the same scenes, having modeled their respective arts on the pursuit of the same ideals. Initially Pope suggests Italy and Italian art as the source of their creativity: "Together o'er the *Alps* methinks we fly"; and later "With thee, on *Raphael*'s Monument I mourn" (ll. 25, 27). He depicts Jervas as reveling in the Italian renaissance: Raphael, Guido, Correggio, Caracci, and Titian are all cited with apparent approval. Jervas's admiration gives Pope's poem both its object and its energy, the superlative qualities of the painter's art encouraging his best efforts.

Yet despite this early praise, Pope's attitude to the work of his sometime colleague becomes increasingly competitive. Toward the end of the poem Pope implies that the Italian scenes revered by Jervas can take art only so far, leaving it stilted and

uninspired. Du Fresnoy's precepts are similarly useful, but limited. For is it not the case, Pope suggests a little teasingly, that the living beauty of a woman implants the "image in the painter's breast" more forcibly than this "small, well-polished gem, the work of years" (ll. 42, 40)? To make his case more persuasive, Pope reminds Jervas of his success in painting their most beautiful female contemporaries: Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater, Martha and Teresa Blount, Arabella Fermor, and Lady Worsley (in early editions Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was praised instead of the last-named):

> Oh lasting as those colours may they shine,
> Free as thy stroke, yet faultless as thy line!
> New graces yearly, like thy works, display;
> Soft without weakness, without glaring gay;
> Led by some rule, that guides, but not constrains;
> And finish'd more thro' happiness than pains!
> The kindred arts shall in their praise conspire,
> One dip the pencil, and one string the lyre.
> (ll. 63–70)

Pope's willingness to treat women as art objects, rhetorically recreating their physical and social presence in aesthetic terms, recurs in his poetry. Such is the fate of the Blount sisters and Arabella Fermor (Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*). It has even been suggested that the dressing-table scene in *The Rape of the Lock* should also be considered as ekphrastic (Chico 2002: 1–23). The case is a persuasive one. However, a clearer example of this mode can be found in *An Epistle to a Lady* (1735):

> How many pictures of one Nymph we view,
> All how unlike each other, all how true!
> Arcadia's Countess, here, in ermin'd pride,
> Is there, Pastora by a fountain side.
> Here Fannia, leering on her own good man,
> And there, a naked Leda with a Swan.
> (ll. 5–10)

Significantly, Pope writes about art because he wishes to see both painting and women better regulated. Suspicion of women and the visual arts underlies his poem: he claims that both are false, excessive, misleading. Worst of all, paintings and women lack the clarity of form that Pope associates with the truly valuable (ll. 151–6).

This judgmental aspect of Pope's ekphrasis seems to have upset Barbauld, who rejects his association of women, corruption, and visual display. Though she begins her poem "To Mrs Priestley, with some Drawings of Birds and Insects" (1773) by following Pope's lead – "The kindred arts two sister Muses guide: / This charms the eye, that steals upon the ear" (ll. 6–7) – Barbauld disengages herself from his skepticism by praising illustrations from natural history, images she associates with

the proper province of the educated woman. The poem closes with an affectionate tribute to her friend:

> Thy friend thus strives to cheat the lonely hour,
> With song, or paint, an insect, or a flower:
> Yet if Amanda praise the flowing line,
> And bend delighted o'er the gay design,
> I envy not, nor emulate the fame
> Or of the painter's, or the poet's name:
> Could I to both with equal claim pretend,
> Yet far, far dearer were the name of FRIEND.
> (ll. 121–8)

For Barbauld the visual arts are connected to the acquisition of knowledge: knowledge that both delights and instructs, granting women intellectual opportunities rather than merely fashionable diversions. Viewed from this challenging perspective, Pope's later work reveals an antipathy toward women and toward painting, one that replaced an earlier affection for both.

Nonetheless, Reynolds took a line from Pope's *Epistle to a Lady* to make a similar point. Discussing the work of the painters Correggio and Parmigianino, Reynolds complains that by "endeavouring to give the utmost degree of grace, [they] have exceeded its boundaries, and have fallen into the most hateful of all hateful qualities, affectation." Such work, he writes, is on "the brink of all we hate" (Reynolds 1997: 72). Reynolds's position is quite clear: he can tolerate a measure of graceful elegance, but when overdone it reaches "the very verge of ridicule." For Reynolds, the masculinity of both the painter and the critic is threatened by the dangerous softening enacted by an overly polished art: solid form had to be maintained. What is important in this context is that Reynolds's borrowing of Pope's condemnation of the erring woman returns critical focus to the question of decorum and appropriateness. This was a crucial concern for all writers on the arts after Horace. Indeed, Horace's famous comparison of painting and poetry was made not in pursuit of any union of the arts, but in defense of the principle of decorum. According to Horace, poets should restrict and modify their imaginations by remembering the limits that plausibility and good sense imposed on painters. To do otherwise was to risk, in Reynolds's terms, effeminate excess. This shared masculinist language, found both in Pope's poetry (even the epistles to Jervas and Addison) discloses the often highly gendered language in which the arts were discussed and in which the necessity of form and control was maintained.

The emphasis that both Reynolds and Pope place on form, decorum, and elegant restraint was challenged in the later decades of the century (though Reynolds remained enormously influential on poets and artists alike, as will be seen below). Increasingly, Pope was seen as restricting the activity of the poet, preserving decorum but to the detriment of passion and the imagination. Foremost in making this objection were

Joseph and Thomas Warton. The work of the Warton brothers builds on poetry by Akenside, Thomson, and William Collins that sought to release the imagination, to express feeling unconstrained by rules. This approach is evident from Joseph Warton's poem "The Enthusiast" (1744), where he writes of "art's vain pomps" and opposes such limited ambition to the natural sublime of "some pine topp'd precipice" or a "foamy stream" (ll. 4, 29, 30). One of the ways Warton chooses to disclose the endless capacity of the imagination is by comparison with what painting can or cannot achieve:

> Creative Titian, can thy vivid strokes,
> Or thine, O graceful Raphael, dare to vie
> With the rich tints that paint the breathing mead?
> The thousand colour'd tulip, violet's bell
> Snow-clad and meek, the vermil-tinctur'd rose,
> And golden crocus?
>
> (ll. 54–9)

This is a direct challenge to the authority of painting within its own province of vision. Warton is even using the word "paint" to describe what painting cannot reach. Nature, the true source of all art, exceeds in its variety all attempts to contain or represent it. A critic inspired by a Johnsonian regard for the propriety of poetic language might object in painting's defense that Warton has pushed his meaning too far and that color is truly realizable only in paint, a point evidenced by the poet's recourse to a phrase like "vermil-tinctur'd." It could also be objected that Warton, in his self-declared enthusiasm, has written something that cannot be fully imagined: the "thousand colour'd tulip." Warton's primary target is not, however, the art of painting. His point is more that nature and the imagination will always exceed attempts to represent them. To this degree he anticipates renewed British critical and creative interest in Longinus (see Meehan 1986), whose treatise *On the Sublime* had become increasingly influential by midcentury. Central to the text's appeal was its assertion of language's power, not merely to persuade but to entrance. This gave poets a renewed license to experiment with the power and possibilities of words. Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756) built on this claim, extending poetry's power to realize the sublime, to raise images beyond the confines of sight. By stressing the creative power of words, Burke's argument challenged contemporary poets to exceed artists working in other fields (Burke 1987: 167–77).

Profound as these shifts and challenges were by the end of the period, they should not be allowed to overshadow the equally strong ties that still bound the two arts together. In this context Reynolds's authority cannot be neglected. Reynolds had an extraordinary influence on poets in the latter half of the century, largely because of his pre-eminence as an aesthetic theorist. The primary concern of his *Discourses* (delivered as speeches at the award of the Royal Academy prizes) was to instill in his listeners the idea that painting was a great art that was best practiced by diligent yet ambi-

tious artists familiar not only with the Old Masters but equally with the works of the best poets. They should also appreciate the ideal forms of nature, knowledge that was to be realized in the form of clear designs expressed in distinct, bold lines. These designs were to express a moral purpose, acting as an inspiration to acts of public virtue. Driven by this unshakable ambition, Reynolds insisted that in truly great art there could be no submission to the delinquent forms of modern style or dress, no reliance on mere color, no lazy admission of defects from the lower forms of the arts. Were his advice to be followed, Reynolds claimed, there was no reason why the young painters to whom he directed his more practical remarks should not succeed. Nor was there – at the dawn of a promising new age – any reason why the arts more generally should not prosper. For in Britain, Reynolds asserted, the conditions suddenly existed for such a revival: Wealth combined with taste and elegance provided a rich soil, while patronage poured down from the king and a new institution – the Royal Academy itself – promoted learning (Reynolds 1997: 13; Barrell 1986: 69–162; Lipking 1970: 164–207).

This new confidence was a great inspiration for painters, but what did it matter to poets? In the first place, Reynolds's argument that the arts in Britain were improving matched the aspiration expressed by many poets throughout the century. Indeed, the aim of reviving the arts recurs time and again in eighteenth-century poetry and its criticism. The ambition was most often expressed within a civic humanist analysis of cultures and their progression and collapse. Accordingly, accounts of the revival of the arts were haunted by that ideology's fearful anticipation of eventual fall. Joseph Spence, to take just one example, explained in his *Polymetis* (1747) how in the Roman world the arts rose together from rude force through all the stages of mounting excellence before decaying together as a result of the luxury and folly that characterized the corruption of that empire. Similarly stadial models can be found in John Brown's *Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power, the Progressions, Separations and Corruptions, of Poetry and Music* (1763) and in the work of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as David Hume, Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith. In each case there is the assumption that political and moral conditions need to be right for the arts to flourish. Reynolds advances much the same argument in his *Discourses*, yet does so rather more hopefully than some of his contemporaries. His own career seemed to confirm his optimism, allowing him to blaze a path that others might set out to follow. It was in this spirit that the painter received generous praise from William Cowper in the first book of *The Task*. There, amid his otherwise cautious and ambivalent discussion of London, Cowper found a moment to praise the talents of his great contemporary: "There, touched by Reynolds, a dull blank becomes / A lucid mirror, in which nature sees / All her reflected features" (bk. 1, ll. 700–2). Reynolds, along with the sculptor John Bacon, is thought by Cowper to offer some recompense for the greedy calculus that characterizes a modern commercial city. Cowper was not the only poet to praise Reynolds. The artist received similarly high praise from Oliver Goldsmith (admittedly a friend), Mary Robinson, and even a young William Wordsworth – all of whom seem to have been inspired by Reynolds's ability as a painter to make renewed efforts

in their own art. These commendations are important. They speak to the kinds of supportive interconnection though which the arts were united in the minds of many eighteenth-century writers as a challenge to emulation.

Notwithstanding this mutual regard, poets – even those who admired painters or were friends with them – insisted that the power of words exceeded that of line and pigment. In some senses this competitiveness was all on one side. Reynolds never suggested that painters could exceed poets, save in the purely visual aspects of their art. On the contrary, he insisted that young painters should learn from the poets and find their inspiration in the works of the best writers (Reynolds 1997: 117–18). Yet it remained true that when poets wished to assert their version of what art should be, they chose to dispute the art of painting – and perhaps with Reynolds in particular. This is certainly the case in Thomas Warton's "Verses on Sir Joshua Reynolds's Painted Window at New-College Oxford" (1782). Warton's poem is one of apparent praise for his friend's designs for the new windows that were installed in the Oxford chapel. The design was allegorical: figures representing Justice, Mercy, and others were depicted in loose flowing gowns in accordance with the canons of neoclassical taste. Reynolds made little effort to respond to the fourteenth-century gothic surroundings of the chapel, preferring instead to insist upon his own high-minded aesthetic (Postle 1995: 168–84). Warton was a lover of the gothic and of British antiquities, the reverse of what Reynolds held dear. Yet his poem is affectionate, even playful. He clearly values Reynolds's art, understanding the intention that animates the work. Nonetheless, Warton steadily questions the appropriateness of such ambitions within the venerable space of the chapel. The poem begins flatteringly:

> Ah, stay thy treacherous hand, forbear to trace
> Those faultless forms of elegance and grace!
> Ah, cease to spread the bright transparent mass,
> With Titian's pencil, o'er the speaking glass!
> Nor steal by strokes of art with truth combin'd,
> The fond illusions of my wayward mind!
> For long, enamour'd of a barbarous age,
> A faithless truant to the classic page;
> Long have I lov'd to catch the simple chime
> Of minstrel-harps, and spell the fabling rime;
> To view the festive rites, the knightly play,
> That deck'd heroic Albion's elder day.
> (ll. 1–12)

Warton is being canny here: he represents Reynolds's art (much as the artist might have done) as committed to truth and elegance, acknowledging its "faultless forms" along the way. But Warton's poem has a rather subtle and shifting surface: "faultless" begins to look like a synonym for insipid as the poet describes the pageantry of "heroic Albion's day." In this opening Warton represents Reynolds's classical art as

something that seduces him away from his own first and true love, the native gothic as represented by knights and minstrels with their simple and heroic lives.

This idea of being in love is crucial. Warton bases his aesthetic not on reason and discrimination, as Reynolds had done, but on intuitive feeling, and it is this emotional responsiveness (a certain susceptibility to sensory delight or pain) that had sanctioned his taste, not cold judgment. The poet's preference for imagination over staid decorum becomes more marked later in the poem as Warton launches into fine nostalgic reverie on his love for gothic:

> But chief, enraptur'd have I lov'd to roam,
> A lingering votary, the vaulted dome,
> Where the tall shafts, that mount in massy pride,
> Their mingling branches shoot from side to side;
> Where elfin sculptors, with fantastic clew,
> O'er the long roof their wild embroidery drew;
> Where SUPERSTITION, with capricious hand
> In many a maze the wreathed window plann'd,
> With hues romantic ting'd the gorgeous pane,
> To fill with holy light the wondrous fane.
>
> (ll. 17–26)

It is rather luxuriant writing, and it is meant to be: Warton allows himself, and in turn his reader, to reverse the seduction of Reynolds's classical forms and to return in wonder to the alternately brooding and illuminated spaces of ancient Britannia. Warton's poem continues in this vein, basing its praise for the gothic on a display of sumptuous feeling rather than reasoned argument. It is in many senses a triumph for the new poetics of feeling – an aesthetic that would run a parallel path to Reynolds's rational classicism. However, Warton's poem ends abruptly, with a return to praise of Reynolds:

> REYNOLDS, 'tis thine, from this broad window's height,
> To add new lustre to religious light:
> Not of its pomp to strip this ancient shrine,
> But bid that pomp with purer radiance shine:
> With arts unknown before, to reconcile
> The willing Graces to the Gothic pile.
>
> (ll. 101–6)

Reynolds, wisely, did not believe him. Writing after he had received a copy of the poem, he confided: "I owe you great obligations for the Sacrifice which you have made or pretend to have made, to modern Art" (Reynolds 2000: 107). Warton's vision of a reconciliation of European classicism with British gothic was perhaps always a little suspect. More accurately, Reynolds understood that the two men represented

rival views of what art should be. For Warton, the gothic with its brooding darkness and embodied feeling fostered sensations that have at their heart an image of ancient Britain. For Reynolds, classicism represented the light and promise of European rationality: clear-thinking, dignified art. During the eighteenth century both viewpoints provided powerful accounts of what art could and should be, and if Reynolds's scheme now seems more alien to us, then that is only because of the continuing and now unquestioned association of creativity with feeling. More importantly, the argument between Warton and Reynolds reveals that, as eighteenth-century poets worked to create new directions in poetry, they did do in relation to what Reynolds, quite rightly, called "modern Art."

See also chs. 3, "Poetry and Science"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 34, "Augustanism and Pre-Romanticism"; 36, "The Pleasures and Perils of the Imagination"; 37, "The Sublime."

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7
Poetry, Popular Culture, and the Literary Marketplace

George Justice

Colley Cibber's pamphlet of 1742, *A Letter to Mr Pope*, responded to Alexander Pope's making Cibber chief dunce in his four-book revision of *The Dunciad*. Cibber's *Letter* became the talk of the town, inspiring a response in the periodical *Universal Spectator* that sided with Pope, although it made sure to reproduce the juicy bits from Cibber's attack. Edward Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine* republished the piece from the *Universal Spectator*, complete with the lengthy quotations from Cibber's pamphlet. Cibber praises the power of Pope's verse, claiming that "your Talent has something the better of me; for any Accusation, in smooth Verse, will always sound well, though it is not tied down to have a Tittle of Truth in it" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1742: 428). Throughout the century, professional and amateur writers alike could harness the "harmonious Advantage" of verse (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1742: 428). Poetry was a common language of the day, and Cibber's own position as Poet Laureate fueled the establishment of a celebrity culture, discussed incessantly in periodicals such as the *Universal Spectator*, the *London Magazine*, and the *Gentleman's Magazine*. At the same time, periodicals served as outlets for amateur poets, publishing the ephemeral output of mediocre verse that became codified in collected annual volumes.

This essay examines the relationship between poetry and popular culture in the eighteenth century as illustrated and propelled by the *Gentleman's Magazine*, perhaps the most important popular periodical of the period. The expansion of the literary marketplace fostered both a professional culture of literary celebrities and a democratization of reading and writing. Analysis of the way poetry is discussed and published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* reveals that for-profit publishing during the century encouraged amateur and professional writers alike. For the *Gentleman's Magazine* and its competitors, literature existed to move product. The amateur and professional cultures of poetry represented and reproduced in the *Gentleman's Magazine* together served the magazine's economic function.

A more exhaustive analysis of poetry and popular culture would examine published ballads and chapbooks with wide circulation, including song collections like D'Urfey's

Pills to Purge Melancholy; anthologies of poetry for the classroom and home use, from Bysshe's *Art of English Poetry* to Knox's *Elegant Extracts*; collections of older work like Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*; books of hymns; and, indeed, other literary magazines that published new and reprinted poetry. All of these publications serve to illustrate broad trends in the commercialization of literary culture in the eighteenth century. Selling poetry required encouragement of readers as writers, as well as producing an increased awe for masters of the craft whose superiority might garner attention and high sales.

In the opening lines of *The Dunciad*, Alexander Pope had proclaimed himself "the first who brings / The Smithfield Muses to the ear of Kings" (Pope 1939–69: vol. 5, i. 1–2). *The Dunciad* itself was a best-selling poem that became a crucial building block in the formation of an eighteenth-century media-produced "popular culture." It attempted, not altogether cleanly, to differentiate itself from the festival world of gross bodies and bad writing (Stallybrass and White 1986: 109–18). Eighteenth-century "popular culture" was paradoxically predicated upon the mass media's self-conscious rejection of folk culture (although the controversy over Macpherson's "translations" of Ossian's highland poetry later in the century reflects an eventual incorporation of "tradition" as an element of the machinery of modern culture).

Twentieth-century conceptions of "popular culture" require a capitalized mass media that did not fully emerge until the nineteenth century with the capabilities of the machine press, which could churn out large amounts of novel entertainment for a growing literate population (Gans 1974). In eighteenth-century Britain, the literary marketplace developed a nascent version of popular culture for middle-class audiences through an expansion in the publication and distribution of print. William Warner has dubbed the 1740s the era of the "Pamela Media Event," and other scholars have contributed to our understanding of the ways in which the new discipline of marketing supplements the expansion of culture (Warner 1998). Anthony Barker's recent essay on contributions to the "Poetical Essays" section of the *Gentleman's Magazine* in the 1730s and 1740s explores the amateur poetry that Cave published in its first two decades. Barker's essay sets the stage for a new appreciation of the culture of poetic life for provincial poets in the eighteenth century, and it provides a sense of the high quality of some of the poetry published by the underappreciated, often anonymous, men and women who used the *Gentleman's Magazine* as an outlet for their creative energies (Barker 1996).

If much of the poetry collected in "Poetical Essays" reflects the middle-class amateur culture described by Barker, many other elements in the periodical, from its frontispieces to its lists of recently published work, depended on and even fueled the professional literary culture of its day. The *Gentleman's Magazine* needed Pope and Cibber as much as it needed the provincial clergy and amateur women poets. Curiously, what emerges from a holistic examination of the contents of the *Gentleman's Magazine* is a poetic culture unified in its divisions. What is distinctive about the poetic culture of the magazine – and eighteenth-century literary culture more broadly –

is a discourse of poetry as common language, as intrinsic to national greatness, and as economic commodity.

Thus there are two mutually dependent aspects of "popular culture" embodied in the *Gentleman's Magazine*'s use and printing of poetry: verse produced by amateur authors representing a range of subjects and participating in conversation with other contributors; and verse and prose by and about professional poets. "Contributor culture" and "celebrity culture" do not correspond to our notions of "middlebrow" and "high" culture, however. Instead, hierarchies of verse were worked through within each of these broader categories. Cibber's laureate verse, for example, finds its own low place within the "celebrity" category shared with – and even created with – his nemesis Alexander Pope. Both contributor culture and celebrity culture depend for their creation on the engine of the literary marketplace, which operates less selectively (and more opportunistically) than some teleological interpretations of literary history have imagined. Through understanding how the *Gentleman's Magazine* is suffused with poetry, both in and outside the "Poetical Essays" section of each issue, we can see how English literature became an economic force in a culture industry pushing to take advantage wherever it could of the literary marketplace's increasing reach in London, and out from London to the provinces.

There is a long history of verse appearing in literary periodicals. Early in the century, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* present some of these issues in ways superior to other early journals: the editor Joseph Addison makes the low high and brings the high down to the "common reader" with serious criticism of the popular ballad "Chevy Chase" and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. From their inception, literary periodicals printed verse by contributors hoping to make a name – including Jonathan Swift, whose "Ode to the Athenian Society" was published in a supplement to the *Athenian Gazette* in 1692. Verse also made its way into articles otherwise written in prose, pushing forward an epigrammatic point or presenting a shorthand method of communication between writers and readers equally steeped in a common language of well-known poetry.

Edward Cave, who founded the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1731 as a "public storehouse" (Kuist 1982: 3), might be called the Sam "Wal-Mart" Walton of the eighteenth-century literary marketplace. His innovation lay in bringing a commodity to its established market at less cost and with greater speed than his competitors. His achievement spawned envy and imitation, but the *Gentleman's Magazine* had its market cornered. Samuel Johnson was the most famous of Cave's assistants, and after Cave's death in 1754 family members continued the enterprise, the success of which popularized the label "magazine" for this kind of periodical publication. John Nichols bought shares in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1778, and his family controlled the publication until 1856, by which time "its significance among English periodicals had declined" (Kuist 1982: 4).

Cave's original method involved producing summaries and extracts from other news journals to provide both a historical record and updates on current events for readers in London and the country. The *Gentleman's Magazine* provided the most

respected resumés of parliamentary debates and, later in the century, became a forum for antiquarian research into literary and historical topics. From its inception, the *Gentleman's Magazine* contained a section of "Poetical Essays." However, the "Poetical Essays" represent only a portion of the verse and, more importantly, the cultural reportage that made up a significant element of the *Gentleman's Magazine*'s main matter of extract and summary. Poetry was popular news, and the *Gentleman's Magazine* both reported and made that news.

Scholars have long recognized the importance of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for an understanding of eighteenth-century poetry. Calvin Yost modeled his dissertation of 1936, "The Poetry of the *Gentleman's Magazine*: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Literary Taste," on Raymond Dexter Havens's pioneering study of poetic miscellanies as guides to "changing taste" (Havens 1929). Yost describes broad trends in eighteenth-century versification through an examination of the "Poetical Essays" of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, concluding on the basis of the "more than fifty-two hundred poems" that poetic form was more stable during the century than had been often assumed (Yost 1936: 11). There is little significant overlap between Yost's study of the history of the "Poetical Essays" and C. Lennart Carlson's tracing of the development of the *Gentleman's Magazine* in relation to British history (and the readership of the magazine). Both Carlson and Yost suggest that the centrality of poetry to the *Gentleman's Magazine* diminishes over the course of the century. But they see poetry as a side issue in the magazine, commenting only on the "Poetical Essays." They focus only on what I call "contributor culture" and therefore argue that the midcentury "Poetical Essays" section is more important than its later version, which publisher John Nichols dubbed "Select Poetry, Ancient and Modern." Ignoring the disputes in prose and verse over Cibber and Pope prevents critics like Yost and Carlson from understanding the changes in the use of poetry and the way it was published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. As celebrity culture coalesces, controversy over Ossian, over "Rowley," over Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* comes to occupy many pages in each issue, even as contributors continue to send their poems to Mr. Urban for publication. In fact, the *Gentleman's Magazine* becomes more interested in poetry, as a living discourse and as a field for antiquarian research, as the century progresses.

It would be nearly impossible to comprehend the full range of eighteenth-century poetry in the *Gentleman's Magazine* within the scope of a short essay. In what follows I isolate several representative factors within volumes of the periodical spaced ten years apart: 1732, 1742, 1752, 1762, 1772, and 1782. Internally, each volume presents a synchronic understanding of its era's culture of poetry – individual issues speak to other individual issues, as poets respond to poets and literary controversies spill over from one month to another. The volumes chosen are arbitrary, but looking at volumes a decade apart reveals the diachronic history of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, as poetry takes on antiquarian interest near the end of the century.

From the beginning, the "Poetical Essays" section of the *Gentleman's Magazine* filled the role of the contemporary poetical "miscellany" – indeed, the *Gentleman's Magazine* as a whole was known as much by the term "miscellany" as by its newly

coined moniker, "magazine." Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* defined "miscellany" as "a mass formed out of various kinds," but refers in its citations specifically to collections of literary writing (Johnson 1996: "miscellany"). (The *OED* provides Cave's periodical title as the first use of the word "magazine" for periodical publication.) In 1752, for example, A. B. presented verses that "came to my hand by accident" and that he wished to see printed; the poem might have been printed before, A. B. says, "but it is not therefore less fit for your miscellany, in which it will be most extensively published, and effectually preserved" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1752: 86). The phrase "extensively published" refers to a mechanism of distribution, a neutral description that fits the idea of the magazine as a disinterested tool for the production and distribution of new information.

At the same time, the *Gentleman's Magazine* extends the role of miscellany into that of historical record – as A. B.'s phrase "effectually preserved" indicates. The prefatory poem congratulating Mr. Urban on his thirty-second volume states,

> From thee succeeding Times shall know
> What War's have vex'd the World below,
> What LEARNING's patient Labour wrought,
> What Poets sung, what Sages thought.
> (ll. 9–12, in *Gentleman's Magazine* 1762: n.p.)

From being truly miscellaneous, the range of poems included in the *Gentleman's Magazine* attempts to compose, or at least to supplement, the historical record embodied by the collected copies of the periodical. Ephemeral scraps come to represent the entire period, held together not by rhetoric but by the sheer mass of printed volumes. For example, in 1742 the *Gentleman's Magazine* included poems in its "Historical Chronicle" section, beginning with "*A New* ODE, *To a great number of* Great Men, *newly made*" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, Aug. 1742: 441). The editor had introduced this piece with a reference to an optimistic account of the change of power attributed to "the Author of *an Enquiry into their present State*" ("their present state" presumably standing in for "the present state of the time"). In October, the "Historical Chronicle" is led off by "*An* ODE, *Humbly inscrib'd to the Rt Hon.* W – *E* – *of* B – " which is introduced with a short headnote: "So many Satirical Poems have been published, since the Ode p. 441, that we may [b]e thought negligent Collectors, if we do not record another Specimen of the Wit of the Times," and includes a note following, stating that "*Impartiality calls on us to give our Readers a Passage on the other Side, from the Pamphlet cited p.* 441" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1742: 544).

"Impartiality" guaranteed paid circulation in the present and a lasting influence for the collected volumes. Impartiality and anonymity provided complementary covers for political and poetical contributions alike. Contributors composed a functioning version of the public sphere, not hiding behind pseudonyms to publish scurrility, but rather using *noms de plume* in order to put forward information and argument

relatively untainted by personal position. The public sphere of most concern here is the specifically literary public sphere in which private and public pleasure are both served by the widespread use of pseudonyms. Attribution for items in the "Poetical Essays" section ranged from complete anonymity, to initials, dates, and places, to pseudonyms that conveyed intended interpretations for the poems. Later volumes of the *Gentleman's Magazine* during the century applied this principle also to the front section of the magazine dedicated to political, historical, cultural, and antiquarian controversies and research.

Cave's most widely discussed attempt to bridge the gap between amateur poetry and the established literary culture of his day involved a juried prize to encourage submissions of long poems on weighty subjects. By the time of the first *Gentleman's Magazine* poetry contest, announced in April 1733, the paper had already become a forum for reader contributions, mainly of short pieces of verse. The collected volume for 1735 includes a complaint (in verse) that Cave was taking too long to publish readers' verse contributions, as well as an "extraordinary issue" in July 1735, containing the prizewinning poems. Cave's competitions failed to attract submissions from professional poets, despite the generous prizes, which offered more money than most poets could expect to gain from separate publication for a single long poem. (Prizes began at forty or fifty pounds for first place, descending to medals and other items for lower rankings.) These contests were repeatedly won by Moses Browne, and Cave ceased running them by the end of the magazine's first decade. The fate of the poetry contests suggests that the literary marketplace operated according to standards different from those of the general economy: a large prize to the discoverer of a technique to establish longitude could work, and yet a prize for great poetry would result in mere mediocrity. Over the course of its history, some poets who became prominent published early in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (Akenside, for example), but the prizes did not accomplish what laudatory verses addressed to eidolon Sylvanus Urban had proclaimed:

> Such constant Favour warms his grateful Heart,
> By generous Schemes new Knowledge to impart;
> Prompts him to raise the drooping Muse's aim,
> And bid the World revere the *British* Name* . . .
> *Alluding to the 50 *l.* and other Prizes for the Poets, particularly the Gold Medal, the Motto of which is, *England may challenge the World.*
>
> (ll. 27–30, in *Gentleman's Magazine* 1736: n.p.)

The relative failure of the competitions, however, did not diminish the importance of poetry and literary culture more generally in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. "Writing to the moment" is a phrase most often related to fiction of the period, particularly Samuel Richardson's novels, with their breathless epistolary present-tense narration. The poetry in the *Gentleman's Magazine* achieves a similar immediacy through anonymity and nearly instantaneous publication. The frequent attachment of dates and

pen-names to poems allows for a number of effects, most prominently the participation of women as contributors of verse that oversteps the boundaries of genteel propriety. Gender was a prominent topic, as male and female poets offered contributions attacking and praising the other sex. For example, in August 1742 Quindecimnatus provides a sarcastic attack on women:

> A woman's vows are changeable as air;
> A breath provokes, a breath can sooth the fair;
> Their firm resolves are ev'n as good as none,
> For ev'ry *Dido* finds a *Venus*' son.
> (ll. 1–4, in *Gentleman's Magazine*, Aug. 1742: 437)

The next month Quindecimnatus was answered by Quadragintanata, Quindecimnata, and Constantia [Grierson] (*Gentleman's Magazine*, Sept. 1742: 491, 493). Quadragintanata's rejoinder states:

> Your inexperienc'd years and verses show
> How little you the world and women know,
> You say "our vows are changeable as air"
> Know, choice of lovers is forbid the fair;
> (ll. 1–4, in *Gentleman's Magazine*, Sept. 1742: 491)

Not to be outdone, Quindecimnatus replies in October:

> Why, wanton widow, am I told,
> My untry'd youth is much too bold,
> To vent its satire on the fair,
> When it knows not what they are.
> (ll. 1–4, in *Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1742: 543)

In November, Belinda counters with:

> Take in the manger, cur, your seat,
> And bark – because you cannot eat.
> *You* tax us with our vows untrue!
> What, snarler, are our vows to you?
> (ll. 1–4, in *Gentleman's Magazine*, Nov. 1742: 600)

The interest in gender and women's poetry more generally was not limited to bantering exchanges in the battle of the sexes. In February 1762, for example, a cluster of

poems in the "Poetical Essays" section is dedicated to Elizabeth Carter, including "*On the Death of Mrs* ROWE. *From a Collection of Poems lately published by Mrs* Eliz. Carter"; "*On reading Miss* Carter's *Poems in M.S. By Lord Littleton*"; and "VERSES *occasioned by reading Miss* CARTER'S POEMS" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1762: 86–7). Anna Seward's writing and life became of great interest to readers of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In 1782, in the midst of controversy surrounding the critical evaluations in Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, one contributor, Philo-Lyristes, declares: "There is, however, a poetess of the age, in whom almost every poetical excellence seems to be united. I need not tell you, that it is Miss Seward; . . . her merit is so universally acknowledged, that I trust I shall not be suspected of flattery even to a female" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1782: 22).

The magazine both creates and reflects the history of British culture. Contributors in these years were more aware than ever of a cultural modernism, of their own situation in time and history. The *Gentleman's Magazine* and the poetry it contained and discussed were paradoxically both disposable and permanent. For example, the anonymous "A Hymn to Fashion" of August 1752 captures in a few lines the difficulty of culling the worthwhile from the dross:

> Myriads of new inventions glide away,
> Spring up, and bloom, and perish in a day,
> More precious some deserve a happier fate,
> A nice attention, and a longer date:
> Such, and such only prompt me now to sing,
> And rescue from oblivion's gloomy wing!
> (ll. 35–40, in *Gentleman's Magazine* 1752: 377)

Carlson notes that the introductory section of extracts in the *Gentleman's Magazine* was "essentially historical" in its early years (Carlson 1938: 52). He describes Cave's attempt to present and preserve an accurate picture of the historical record both for current readers and for later readers, who could consult earlier volumes as a trustworthy account of other times. The *Gentleman's Magazine* sets out to preserve the ephemeral, and by doing so – for a large participatory public – it alters the shape and structure of poetic culture. The precise dating of many of the poems in the "Poetical Essays" sections, usually to a day in the month covered by the issue in which a poem first appeared, makes the magazine a historical record of cultural as well as political events, even when the poetry itself does not aspire to permanent literary value. Fragments of culture presented as ephemeral verse stand in for a whole culture that can be reached through owning and reading the sequence of volumes.

Even advertisements in the *Gentleman's Magazine* therefore become a matter of historical record, transforming the most interested rhetoric into historical "impartiality." The "Register of Books" in each issue of the magazine's early years would be one of the principal ways in which readers would learn of new publications. Later publishers

of the *Gentleman's Magazine* expanded the "Register of Books" into a section entitled "Impartial and Critical Review of New Publications," providing a numerical sequence of book reviews across issues within the same volume year. The general business model of the *Gentleman's Magazine* was to appropriate popular features of other periodicals, and in this case the venerable, even creaky, magazine was responding to two popular upstarts: the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review*.

Advertising in the *Gentleman's Magazine* was not limited to the list of books published at the end of each volume. Medical advertisements in verse were popular. For example, "*To Mr* RICHARD DRAKE, *The eminent Inventor of a* Medicine that really cures the Gout, *is sent this sincere and hearty congratulatory Address by* Arthriticus Eboracensis" appeared in Latin and English in July 1752. This is a brief extract:

> Tho' the dire malady your limbs invade,
> Stomach, or chest, it brings a certain aid.
> How blest the patient, if his bliss he knew,
> (Taught by experience what I say is true)
> The friendly cordial he shall surely see
> Afford that ease to him, it gave to me.
>
> (ll. 11–16, in *Gentleman's Magazine* 1752: 329)

In May 1762 the lead poem in the "Poetical Essays" was "*To* Samuel Wather, *M. D. By the Rev. Mr.* Thomas Gibbons, M. A." The verse puffs not only the good doctor's services, but also a volume published by Gibbons himself: "This Author has lately published a Volume of Sermons, with a Hymn adapted to the subject of each, intended for the Devotion of the family and the closet" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1762: 233).

Eventually, the "Register of Books" became "Books Publish'd," the monthly section evolving into a forum for controversy, criticism, and literary gossip. The early phase of this shift can be illustrated by a series of items published in the magazine near the end of 1752, when a feud between Christopher Smart and John Hill, hack writer of the periodical *Inspector*, erupted in pamphlets and advertisements across a wide range of publications. Smart's *Poems* had been listed in June's "Books Publish'd," and so the production of controversy cannot be fully dissociated from the haze of publicity surrounding the poems themselves (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1752: 291). Readers might not ultimately differentiate between the publicity and the product, as pages devoted to controversy outnumbered the attention given to Smart's verse itself. The *Gentleman's Magazine* reproduces and furthers the exchanges between Smart and Hill, including cross-references to earlier issues of the periodical as well as to other periodicals and pamphlets (Bertelsen 1999).

Advertising in verse took many shapes in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The "Poetical Essays" in May 1752 featured "A BATCHELOR'S *Address, or Proposal to the* MAIDENS" by Cynthio (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1752: 233), in which the pseudonymous poet expresses a desire for a wife with merit rather than beauty, and then describes himself and his

person. He receives an answer in August 1752 from Sylvia, who presents herself as a potential mate. These lines conclude Sylvia's bold offer:

> I care not then (if loving) tho' my honey
> "Be e'er so long, and lank, and lean, and boney";
> If nature has not dreadfully unkind,
> Stampt him deform'd, or lame, or deaf, or blind.
> If free from such defects he'll take to wife,
> And love as dearly as he loves his life,
> A maid of middle size, and middle stature,
> Not beautiful, nor yet an ugly creature;
> Not quite a girl, just twenty four her age,
> Her heart yet free from love's tyrannic rage.
> (ll. 39–48, in *Gentleman's Magazine* 1752: 332)

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* verse serves as a language of communication. Popular culture had reached a voyeuristic stage in which an audience could enjoy the mediocre mating cries of a semi-educated circle of readers and writers. Cynthio responded to Sylvia in November, repudiating a rumor he nevertheless wittily repeats: that Sylvia is a man.

By 1742, and Garrick's rise to fame, drama and verse are linked in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and the periodical contributes to theatrical culture. For most of the century the *Gentleman's Magazine* contained a register of plays performed each month, and the "Poetical Essays" came to include numerous prologues to plays, both as performed and as written but not performed. For example, in 1762 the "Poetical Essays" section was overtaken by theatrical advertisement. The April issue includes as its first specimen an "*Account of the* Farmer's Return from London; *An Interlude. As it is performed at the Theatre Royal in* Drury Lane; *published, in Quarto*" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1762: 184–5). In the same issue is "*An Account of the* School for Lovers, *a new Comedy; by* William Whitehead, Esq," which provides extracts and criticism, and concludes with quotation from the end of the play with reference to lines from Pope:

> The characters are extremely well drawn, and sustained; the dialogue is natural and spirited; the sentiments are chaste and elegant, and some of the situations are touching and tender in the highest degree.
> The broadest mirth unfeeling folly wears,
> Gives less delight than Virtue's very tears.
> POPE.
> (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1762: 161)

The May issue of the same year contains "*To a Young Gentleman. Written on a blank Leaf in his* Dod[s]ley's *Collection*," signed *Glasgow*, W. K. The piece suggests that the addressee of the poem will "extract fair Virtue's power divine" from reading the "unequall'd lays" in Dodsley's *Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (ll. 6–7, in

Gentleman's Magazine 1762: 234). Dodsley's *Collection* reappears as a matter of interest in 1782, when Nichols, by now the publisher of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, issues an updated version edited by Isaac Reed. What is now the "Impartial and Critical Review of New Publications" discusses Reed's edition, and then in subsequent issues for the year various readers dispute Reed's annotations or comment on the value of the *Collection* as an authoritative record of eighteenth-century English poetry. Each decade had been invested in its own controversy, beginning with that between Pope and Cibber in the 1730s and 1740s, fueled by the *Gentleman's Magazine*'s frequent reproduction of items from the *Grub Street Journal* along with extracts from Pope's *Essay on Man* and annual printing of Cibber's odes as Poet Laureate on the monarch's birth (occasionally including, as well, parodic attacks on Cibber's bad verse alongside the original). Always the *Gentleman's Magazine* tries to mediate disputes, even when its judgment is apparent: although the magazine clearly sided with Pope, it included extracts attacking the *Grub Street Journal* and Pope, along with poetry and news items paying homage to the poet.

Unsurprisingly, Pope's centrality to eighteenth-century popular culture was recognized in nearly every monthly issue of the magazine in its first decades, even if his own poetry was reproduced only in passing – in the body of prose essays, in a frontispiece (see 1752, which mangles verse from the *Essay on Man* to fit its allegorical illustration), or as epigraph for the amateur poets in the "Poetical Essays" (in June 1742, for example, there appeared "The Triumphs of Nature," a poem celebrating Cobham's gardens at Stowe, with an epigraph from Pope: *Gentleman's Magazine* 1742: 324). A lineage can be drawn from Pope through to other controversies: Richard Savage, for whom Pope acted unsuccessfully as mentor and charity administrator, is represented by reprinting of his annual Volunteer Laureate poems as well as by a poem in November 1742, "On Richard Savage, Esq," by Wm. Saunders (author of translations of Lucian also published that year in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1742: 597). Savage's biographer, Samuel Johnson, was associated with the *Gentleman's Magazine* as a writer, an editor, and, finally at the end of his life, as a subject of controversy, when his *Lives of the Poets* received blame, praise, and correction. His perceived attack on Thomas Gray generated much response, and his "Life of Young" prompted additional biographical material and critical commentary.

Young's role in the *Gentleman's Magazine* is worth pondering. In December 1742 the magazine published an extract from Young's *Night Thoughts*, which had been published on November 30 (Foxon 1975: 912). Generally, the "Poetical Essays" published original contributions from its readers or poets published by Cave himself, but Young's poem had been first published by Robert Dodsley, who was to become a friend and publisher of Samuel Johnson, but who had no apparent financial connection with Cave or the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Carlson argues that a "dislike for melancholy verse" on the part of either Cave or his readers (Carlson 1938: 234) may have caused this to be the only extract from Young's popular work to appear in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The *Gentleman's Magazine* did not commonly reprint poetry, and the editor's headnote to the extract from *Night Thoughts* is apologetic but revealing:

> All the foregoing poetical pieces, except one or two, were sent us, by our kind correspondents for the last month: Yet we shall not fear to disoblige others, by filling up the remainder of our poetical article with the following passages from the *Complaint, Night II.* just published; a performance universally admired for the sublimity of the sentiments, the strength of the imagery, and those surprising sallies of the poet's imagination that burst unexpected, as lightening, upon the mind. (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1742: 656)

Carlson suggests that Cave disliked Young's poetry, but in a short poem on Oxford published in 1752, Musæus declares:

> Here *Poesy* expands her page;
> The **Theban* swells th'unbounded song;
> Fir'd with the same extatic rage,
> Tow'rs the stupendous muse of *Young*.
> [**Pindar*]
> (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1752: 379)

The praise of Young in other poems and the discussion of his life throughout the century's issues of the *Gentleman's Magazine* reveal that the periodical press could fuel the popularity of a poet with only minimal direct quotation.

Other nodes of controversy in the *Gentleman's Magazine* during the century include the life and writings of Jonathan Swift; the authenticity of James Macpherson's Ossian, which extended in reviews and articles from initial publication through to the end of our period; and the debate over Thomas Chatterton's Rowley poems in 1782 (coverage in the *Gentleman's Magazine* began in 1781 with discussion of Jacob Bryant's recently published *Observations upon the poems of Thomas Rowley*). The obsession with Chatterton's forgery – or Chatterton's genius – coincided with the turn of the magazine and poetic culture to antiquarianism and a self-conscious understanding of the greatness of Britain, past and present. By this time the "Poetical Essays" section had been renamed "Select Poetry, Ancient and Modern," and included reprinted and newly uncovered poems as well as contributions from amateur poets. In 1782 the *Gentleman's Magazine* reproduced arguments by Milles and other pro-Rowleians as well as by Thomas Warton and other anti-Rowleians, including Horace Walpole, the editor attempting (unsuccessfully) to advocate a gentlemanly form of critical dispute.

A. B.'s letter to Mr. Urban in February 1782 demonstrates the effect the *Gentleman's Magazine* could have on popular culture. A. B. has come late to the Rowley game, and he credits the *Gentleman's Magazine* with sparking his interest in the poems in the first place: "I designedly avoided the purchase of *Rowley's* Poems, from a resolution not to engage in an idle controversy: but I am led into it by your pleasing Miscellany, and cannot help espousing the part of your warm and ingenious correspondent, who appeared in your December Magazine and Supplement" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1782: 76). In March Robertus de Glaston contributes a satiric comment in absurd Rowleian verse on the changes in Oxford. The refrain of several of the stanzas reads:

> Staie, holie mother, staie soche vanitie,
> Albe soe trym, thys noughte beseemythe thee.
> (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1782: 134)

This year also saw the appearance of an "Ode to Edmund Malone" that pretended to support Milles's and Bryant's arguments (*Gentleman's Magazine*, Aug. 1782: 379–81) and numerous other letters and pieces of verse. "Rowley" was both of the moment and for all time, a popular style and ephemeral news item that claimed to be rooted in the long history of English culture and that required the most advanced linguistic and cultural analysis made by the most prominent antiquarians and literary historians, working together and against each other in a conflict that aspired to objectivity but that became mired in local issues of publication and personality.

Throughout its eighteenth-century history, then, the *Gentleman's Magazine* produced a popular culture of poetry that operated on a number of political, cultural, and economic levels. The incoherent jumble of prose and verse that reflects on and constitutes "poetry" during the century finds its record, and its engine, in the pages of such periodicals. The editors and publishers of the *Gentleman's Magazine* saw no contradiction between its disinterested aim to preserve a historical record of culture and its very interested aim to dominate the market for monthly periodicals and sell itself, sell products advertised explicitly, and promote a particular version of the cultural marketplace that embraces a professionalism and an amateurism both new to the history of English poetry. The careful indexing and cross-referencing in each monthly issue as well as the collected annual volumes speaks to the magazine's self-conscious centrality: in its own view, it is both a part and the whole of British culture at the same time.

It is as difficult for a modern editor to capture the period in poetry as it was for Dodsley, Pearch, Bell, Johnson, and other eighteenth-century editors of collections of verse. Roger Lonsdale's recent anthologies of eighteenth-century English verse and eighteenth-century English verse by women – the best wide surveys that have ever been produced – consolidate the popular culture of poetry of the age, reproducing items by Pope as well as by anonymous amateur writers (Lonsdale 1984; Lonsdale 1989). Lonsdale's editorial method acknowledges the impossibility of presenting a historically accurate "canon" of English verse during the time, even as it attempts to bring to readers' attention the wide range of verse written and read during the century. These anthologies, arranged chronologically, can provide a sense of the progress of verse, but only as an illustration of the kinds of trends described in Yost's dissertation. The texture of poetic culture is lost in any classificatory scheme that sees poetry as a discourse abstracted from the period's general literary culture. For both professional and amateur readers and writers, the means of production and distribution affected what was written and how that writing was understood, as cultural conversations predominate over finished works produced in isolation. In eighteenth-century Britain, poetry was as alive as popular music is today.

See also chs. 8, "Women Poets and Their Writing in Eighteenth-Century Britain"; 30, "The Verse Epistle"; 38, "Poetry and the City."

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8
Women Poets and Their Writing in Eighteenth-Century Britain

Charlotte Grant

The sheer volume of poetry published by women increased dramatically during the eighteenth century: two collections of verse by women appeared in the first decade, whereas thirty were published in the final decade (Lonsdale 1989: xxi). Women writers made their mark across many literary genres. In Britain by the 1790s there were more female than male novelists, the theater was dominated by women, and in poetry women were "at least for a time, predominant" (Curran 1988: 186–7). Contemporaries commented on the phenomenon in different ways. Vicesimus Knox includes a satirical portrait of a young female poet, "Lesbia," in his essay "On Affectation of Female Learning." His caricature suggests the ubiquity of the image of the poetess by the late 1770s, but his trivializing account of the poetic genres she practices gives only a hint of the scope of women's poetic output in the preceding eighty years.

> Lesbia, when very young, wrote a few rhymes, which, as her age was considered, were much applauded by her friends. Flushed with praise, she considered herself as a second Sappho, and has ever since been devoted to the muse. Her reading was chiefly confined to the poet's corner in news-papers, and her productions have rivalled her models. She composes ænigmas, acrostics, rebusses, and songs, for those little red pocket-books which are annually published for the ladies, and she has had the honour of gaining the reward for expounding the Prize Riddle. Within the circle of her acquaintance, she is much admired. If a wedding happens among any of them, she pays for her bride-cake with an epithalamium; and she keeps in her drawers, like haberdashers wares in a shop, odes, elegies, and epigrams, adapted to every occasion. (Knox 1778–9: vol. 2, 362–3)

Knox's caricature of Lesbia raises many of the problems faced by female poets. Like all but the most privileged men, women rarely had access to a classical education, seen through much of the period as fundamental to any engagement with the English poetic tradition. However, "Lesbia's" use of a classically inspired pseudonym is typical: female poets adopted a variety of means to distance themselves from the commercial

aspect of their writing practice. Pseudonyms such as "Louisa" or "Philomela" were common; as were the anonymous appellations, "by a lady" or "by a young lady." Knox is scathing in his condemnation of the lightweight verses Lesbia writes, and their models in the magazines and ladies' annuals, but his attack suggests the thriving commerce in poetry. Women's poetic activity reached its peak between the 1770s and 1790s, and in all 1,402 first editions by women poets were published between 1770 and 1835 (Jackson 1993: 394; Ashfield 1995: xvi). Knox's analogy with the haberdasher's shop is not flattering, linking Lesbia's writing to a largely female trade with frequently dubious moral associations. The image of poems emerging, like merchandise, from drawers, suggests the negotiation typical of women's poetry between the private and domestic, on the one hand, and the public and, by extension, the political on the other, one of the major themes I want to explore in this chapter.

In the first edition of Knox's essays Lesbia's lover is scared off by her poetic ravings. By the 1784 edition, Knox increases his censure by making his character a married woman, and condemning her for neglecting her maternal duty: "But, while she is soaring on the wings of poetical genius in her study, her poor little boys and girls are left to the company of the scullion in the kitchen. Her mind is extremely active, and it is but justice to allow that she neglects nothing but her duty" (Knox 1784: vol. 20).

That writing poetry endangers a woman's capacity to perform her appropriate social and domestic functions is a commonplace of critiques of female learning. Yet ironically many female poets, such as Charlotte Smith (1749–1806), wrote to support their children when faced with their husbands' debts or bankruptcy. Smith's collection *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784, 1797), instrumental in the Romantic sonnet revival, was fueled by a very real despair and material need. Since writing and the trades related to the rising professional (and literate) classes represented some of the few professions relatively accessible to women in this period, "the professionalisation of writing was of immediate material concern to many women" (Eger et al. 2001: 15).

The old assumption that poetry and domestic duty were inevitably incompatible was challenged throughout the century, as for example by Esther Lewis (fl. 1747–89) in "A Mirror for Detractors. Addressed to a Friend" (written 1748, published 1754). In this imagined eavesdropping on her acquaintance, both men and women attack Lewis's literary ambition. "The men," she suggests, "are mighty apt to say, / 'This silly girl has lost her way . . . / She ought to mind domestic cares, / The sex were made for such affairs'" (ll. 17–18, 25–6, in Lonsdale 1989). In a complaint which echoes Renaissance models, the last stanza asks:

> But, Sir, methinks 'tis very hard
> From pen and ink to be debarred:
> Are simple women only fit
> To dress, to darn, to flower, or knit,
> To mind the distaff, or the spit?
> Why are the needle and the pen

Thought incompatible by men?
May we not sometimes use the quill,
And yet be careful housewives still?
(ll. 144–52, in Lonsdale 1989)

Lewis is in many ways typical. A vicar's daughter from Wiltshire, she was relatively well educated. She published in the *Bath Journal* as "Sylvia" and received encouragement from another contributor of poems, probably the "friend" to whom this poem is addressed, Dr. Samuel Bowden, a local physician. Bowden's "To a Young Lady at Holt on her late Ingenius Poems" appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1749. Her poems were reprinted in other periodicals and commonplace books, and in 1789 as a collection, *Poems Moral and Entertaining*, to raise money for charities in Bath and Gloucester and Sunday schools in Tetbury.

The association with magazines in this period is not, despite Knox's insinuations, necessarily damning. The growth of magazines profoundly affected women's publishing, particularly from the 1730s onwards. Many of the period's major poets, both male and female, published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which was founded in 1731 [*see* ch. 7, "Poetry, Popular Culture, and the Literary Marketplace"]. Edmund Cave, its publisher, was among the major literary figures who, like Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson, actively supported female poets; his monthly poetry pages included writers such as the bluestocking scholar Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806) and the more obscure mother and daughter Jane (1685–1740) and Charlotte Brereton (b. *c.*1720).

In the same period publication by subscription, frequently with the patronage of a major literary figure, became another important means of publishing for women. Jonathan Swift, for example, put considerable effort into promoting a subscription edition of his compatriot Mary Barber's *Poems* published by Samuel Richardson in 1734. Mary Barber (*c.*1690–1757), who also published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, was, according to Lonsdale, "perhaps the first woman poet to make a virtue out of the original educational purposes of her poems (for her sons) and the domestic context of many of them" (Lonsdale 1989: xxvi). One poem, "Written for My Son, and Spoken by Him at His First Putting on Breeches" (1731), is a complaint about the clothes imposed by mothers:

What is it our mammas bewitches,
To plague us little boys with breeches?
. . .
Our legs must suffer by ligation,
To keep the blood from circulation.
(ll. 1–2, 5–6, in Lonsdale 1989)

Unlike "the wild inhabitants of air," boys are compelled to wear clothes that are not "contrived like these, / For use, for ornament and ease!" (ll. 31, 41–2). The poem uses the semi-serious mode to draw attention to the opposition of "Custom"

and "Reason" (ll. 3–4), embracing its domestic context, but highlighting potential absurdities. Another poem addressed to a friend asserts in the opening lines: " 'Tis time to conclude, for I make it a rule / To leave off all writing, when Con. comes from school" ("Conclusion of a Letter to the Rev. Mr. C—," ll. 1–2, in Lonsdale 1989).

Domestic duty is thus embodied and celebrated by Barber, providing a model for much later poetry by women. While the taint of scandal haunts many female writers, particularly early in the century, the period witnessed a shift from accusations of prostitution to a concern that writing detracts from domestic duty (Spencer 2003: 113). In this context Barber's deliberately domestic verse represents an important rhetorical move. In her preface Barber excuses her writing as being fueled first by maternal and then by charitable intentions:

> My Aim being chiefly to form the Minds of my Children, I imagin'd that Precepts convey'd in Verse would be easier remember'd . . . Nor was I ever known to write upon any other Account, till the Distresses of an Officer's Widow set me upon drawing a Petition in Verse, having found that other Methods had proved ineffectual for her Relief. (Barber 1734: xvii–xviii)

Jane Spencer notes that "exactly this transition, from maternal duty within the family to a nurturing role in a wider society, was to authorize women's writing, and women's public activity generally, throughout the eighteenth century and beyond it" (Spencer 2003: 114). Notwithstanding the success of this model, concern about the propriety of publishing and the compatibility of writing with women's domestic duties and familial responsibilities never entirely dissipated, and re-emerged strongly in the conservative atmosphere of the 1790s, when it was also most strongly challenged by women poets such as Helen Maria Williams (?1761–1827), Mary Robinson (1758–1800), and Charlotte Smith.

In the rest of this essay I want to suggest the variety of genre and richness of poetic effect in poems written by women in this period, and draw attention to some common themes and characteristics. Knox may have cast aspersions on the trivial forms apparently favored by the magazines, but female poets took on the major forms of eighteenth-century verse to great effect. This sample will try to tease out some of the ways in which the apparently conflicting demands of duty, specifically domestic duty and labor, poetic endeavor, and the labor of writing are resolved by different poets. I have deliberately chosen poets from a variety of social and economic backgrounds in order to suggest the range of experience from which and about which women wrote poetry in this period. If Knox's caricature suggests an easy familiarity with the kinds of insubstantial verse supposedly written by the typical poetess, this brief sample aims to undermine any singular image of "the female poet," arguing instead for a diversity of effect, form, and intention, while simultaneously pointing to a conversation and series of shared concerns among women poets. Thus I have deliberately chosen poems which address a range of the major themes of particular interest to women poets in

this period: nature, domestic labor, religious belief, the relation of the private to the public sphere, and female friendship.

"Tuneful Singer, and great Winchilsea"

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720), is perhaps best known for her poem "A Nocturnal Rêverie" (1713), which celebrates the natural world untroubled by human activity "whilst Tyrant-*Man* do's sleep" (l. 38, in Fairer and Gerrard 2004). Finch, born Anne Kingsmill, came from an aristocratic family, and in 1682 became maid of honour to the wife of James Stuart, Duke of York. While with the duchess she met Captain Heneage Finch, one of the duke's gentlemen of the bedchamber. They married in 1684 and became prominent members of Court when the Catholic James was crowned King in 1685. When the King went into exile following the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, their public careers ceased. Both came from royalist Anglican families and remained loyal to James II, refusing to swear the required oath of allegiance to William and Mary. After Captain Finch's arrest on charges of treason in 1690, and following the collapse of the case seven months later, they led a retired life in Kent, inheriting the titles of fourth Earl and Countess of Winchilsea in 1712.

Anne Finch's political isolation contrasts with the relatively public attention her poetry received. Many women, particularly those in more elevated social circles, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), tended to circulate their poetry in manuscript rather than publish; but Finch's poems, having first circulated in manuscript, were then published both separately and in collections. Pope, Swift, and Prior all corresponded with her in verse, and her collection *Miscellany Poems* was published in 1713, initially anonymously and then, later the same year, under her own name.

Female poets, in common with some male contemporaries, often maintained a rhetorical modesty, reiterating claims of diffidence, frequently praising retirement and seclusion from the potentially polluting atmosphere of the literary marketplace centered on London. In the context of her own social and political visibility, followed by an equally public retreat to rural retirement, Anne Finch's pleasure in the tranquility of night in "A Nocturnal Rêverie" has a particular resonance. The poem is a single long sentence, structured by the recurring phrase "In such a *Night*" and clauses opening "When [. . .]," a construction repeated twelve times. This enforces a strong impression of the bounded space of calm the night offers, and allows Finch to present a thickly textured account of the aural, visual, and olfactory pleasures of the landscape and its animals at night. She focuses on her perception of the scene: we share her moment of fear followed by relief when alarming noises turn out to come from only a cow, a moment of comic particularity which personalizes and undercuts pastoral conventions. This particularity, typical of writing later in the period influenced by the growing interest in natural history, here allows the reader to experience the changing color of the foxglove in the dim light: "Whilst now a paler Hue the *Foxglove* takes, / Yet checquers still with Red the dusky brakes" (ll. 15–16). It prompts the central

moment in the poem, which celebrates a different form of personal experience: female friendship. The mutability of the foxglove, and that of the "Glow-worms" which are visible only in the twilight, is contrasted in lines 17–20 with praise for Finch's friend Anne Tufton: "Whilst *Salisb'ry* stands the Test of every Light, / In perfect Charms, and perfect Virtue bright" (ll. 19–20). Thus the point of constancy, which implicitly, together with the recorded and remembered fleeting pleasures of the night, sustains the poet through the confusion of the day, comes from female friendship and virtue. The last two lines register the effort and apparent futility of the day's activities: "All's confus'd again; / Our Cares, our Toils, our Clamours are renew'd, / Or Pleasures, seldom reach'd, again pursu'd" (ll. 48–50).

"A Nocturnal Rêverie," then, combines many of the typical concerns of a poetry of retirement: an evocation of the natural world, an awareness of the poet's striving to approach that "Something, too high for Syllables to speak" (l. 42), and an implicit rejection of the "Cares" of the world (l. 49), along with a quietly stated praise of specific female friendship. It is this subtle but pointed praise of female friendship that, as Germaine Greer has shown, Wordsworth, who admired Finch's work, and this poem in particular, erased from his version of the poem included in the album presented to Lady Lowther in 1819 (Greer 1995: 245–58). Wordsworth admires Finch's evocation of the natural world, but denies the link she makes with female virtue.

While "A Nocturnal Rêverie" is in many ways typical of Finch's work, and central to her reputation, particularly as construed by Wordsworth, she also wrote in satiric and more public modes. "A Pindarick Poem Upon the Hurricane in *November 1703*, referring to this Text in *Psalm 148. ver.8. Winds and Storms fulfilling his Word*" is her response to the Great Storm of 26–7 November 1703. Like Defoe, in many of the supposed eye-witness accounts of the event published in his *The Storm: or, a Collection Of the most Remarkable Casualties and Disasters Which happen'd in the Late Dreadful Tempest*, she gives a providential account of the storm, addressing the winds in an elevated rhetorical mode: "Thus You've obey'd, you Winds, that must fulfill / The Great disposer's Righteous Will" (ll. 187–8, in Fairer and Gerrard 2004). Here the particular exceptional event motivates a moralizing poem of public address that ends with a sense of gratitude for what God has spared, and a pious wish: "And They are only safe, whom He alone defends. / Then let to Heaven our general Praise be sent, / Which did our farther Loss, our total Wreck prevent" (ll. 296–8). "Total Wreck" is both literal and metaphorical – God has provided man with the possibility of salvation, and Finch sees it as the poet's duty to direct her readers' thoughts toward God, as well as improving her own verse: "And let the Poet *after God's own Heart* / Direct our Skill in that sublimer part, / And our weak Numbers mend!" (ll. 301–3).

Finch met another female poet, Elizabeth Rowe, at Longleat. Rowe (1674–1737), born Elizabeth Singer, came from a very different background: her father was a wealthy clothier in Frome, Somerset, having previously been a dissenting minister. Through her friendship with the Weymouth family at Longleat she was taught Italian and French and read Tasso along with their daughter Frances, later Countess of Hertford, who also wrote poetry and became a lifelong friend. Rowe

met the poet Matthew Prior in 1703, and later the dissenter Dr. Isaac Watts. In 1694 and 1695 she had sent poems to the *Athenian Mercury* published by John Dunton, who in 1696 published her *Poems on Several Occasions. Written by Philomela*. Rowe, like Anne Finch, was praised as a model for the virtuous female poet by, among others, Jane Brereton, who in her "Epistle to Mrs Anne Griffiths. Written from London, in 1718" distances herself from the dangerous influence of Restoration poets Aphra Behn and Delariviere Manley, claiming instead that "Angelic wit and purest thoughts agree / In tuneful Singer, and great Winchilsea" (ll. 29–30, in Lonsdale 1989). Rowe's poetry, unlike Anne Finch's, remained widely read in the period. The religious poems she wrote after her husband's early death in 1715 were particularly popular, despite evincing what was sometimes seen as a tendency to religious enthusiasm. The fervor of those later poems reflects Rowe's heartfelt language of grief in "Upon the Death of her Husband" (1719), which expresses her devotion to her husband in quasi-religious terms:

> For thee all thoughts of pleasure I forego,
> For thee my tears shall never cease to flow;
> For thee at once I from the world retire,
> To feed in silent shades a hopeless fire.
> My bosom all thy image shall retain,
> The full impression there shall still remain.
> As thou hast taught my tender heart to prove
> The noblest height and elegance of love,
> That sacred passion I to thee confine,
> My spotless faith shall be for ever thine.
> (ll. 88–97, in Lonsdale 1989)

Spencer suggests that Rowe combines both "ecstatic soul and domestic matron," especially as, following her husband's death, she returned to her father's house in Somerset and lived in retirement (Spencer 2003: 112).

"Perception Exquisite": "Stella" and "Lactilla"

The language of feeling explored by Rowe was central to the midcentury culture of sensibility [*see* ch. 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"]. Drawing on the centrality afforded to the passions by the new disciplines of empiricism and moral sense philosophy, sentimental novels explored feeling as a means to a moral end. The elevation of feeling, as remarked by contemporaries and modern critics alike, privileged the feminine; but, as Stuart Curran observes, while celebrating the liberating power of sensibility, women writers needed to assert that "women, too, can *think*" (Curran 1988: 195). Curran points to Hannah More's 1782 poem "Sensibility: An Epistle to the Honourable Mrs Boscawen," which differentiates between genuine sensibility and feeling for feeling's sake, a debased sentimentalism: "While FEELING boasts her

ever-tearful eye, / Stern TRUTH, firm FAITH, and manly VIRTUE fly" (More 1782: ll. 237–8). True sensibility eludes affectation and prompts moral action:

> Sweet Sensibility! thou keen delight!
> Thou hasty moral! sudden sense of right!
> Thou untaught goodness! Virtue's precious seed!
> Thou sweet precursor of the gen'rous deed.
> (ll. 245–8)

"Sensibility" celebrates contemporary artistic and literary figures, and is addressed to Mrs Boscawen, one of the midcentury circle of cultured women known as the "bluestockings." Hannah More (1745–1833) was the fourth of five daughters of a schoolmaster and a farmer's daughter. Educated at home, she later learnt Italian, Spanish, and Latin from the masters at the boarding school run by her eldest sister. Her financial independence derived from the £200 a year settled on her as compensation by William Turner, a local landowner to whom she was engaged, but who consistently delayed the wedding and finally ended the engagement after six years. More never married. She met David Garrick, having written to him after seeing his *Lear* during a visit to London in 1774. She also knew Edmund Burke, Joshua Reynolds, and Samuel Johnson, and in the 1770s and 1780s was part of the bluestocking circle despite being of a lower social rank than many of the others. Her varied output of plays, poetry, and, later, in the 1790s, the series of *Cheap Repository Tracts* – short moral tales aimed at a wide readership – complements her extensive involvement in education, counter-revolutionary politics, and the anti-slavery movement.

In "The Bas Bleu: or, Conversation. Addressed to Mrs Vesey" (1786), More describes the bluestockings' particular form of sociability, in which knowledge is shared through conversation: "Hail, Conversation, soothing Power, / Sweet Goddess of the social hour!" (More 1786: ll. 212–13). In a passage making striking use of the language of trade, she argues that many of the key attributes valued by her society derive their worth from the social and intellectual interaction practiced by the bluestocking salon:

> If none behold, ah! wherefore fair?
> Ah! wherefore wise, if none must hear?
> Our intellectual ore must shine,
> Not slumber, idly, in the mine.
> Let Education's moral mint
> The noblest images imprint;
> Let Taste her curious touchstone hold,
> To try if standard be the gold;
> But 'tis thy commerce, Conversation,
> Must give it use by circulation;
> That noblest commerce of mankind,
> Whose precious merchandize is MIND!
> (ll. 240–51)

The poem pays tribute to the bluestockings, naming Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Vesey, Elizabeth Carter, Hester Chapone, and Frances Boscawen. Their example and patronage played an important part in fashioning the poetic landscape of the second half of the century, especially for women. One of the most direct, although ultimately ambivalent, recipients of that patronage was Ann Yearsley (1752–1806), a milk-woman from Clifton in Bristol. Yearsley's poetry came to the attention of Hannah More when she was shown it by her cook, and More arranged a subscription publication. A letter from More to Elizabeth Montagu that prefaces Yearsley's *Poems, on Several Occasions* (1785) stresses the poet's dire circumstances in the winter of 1783–4: near destitution, with six children and an ailing mother dependent on her and her husband. The successful collection, authored by "Lactilla," praised both Montagu and More (whom Yearsley terms "STELLA"). In "On Mrs Montagu" Yearsley presents Montagu and More as a double act who have allowed her to realize her "innate spark" (l. 35), initially experienced as a burden:

> The effort rude to quench the cheering flame
> Was mine, and e'en on STELLA cou'd I gaze
> With sullen envy, and admiring pride,
> Till, doubly rous'd by MONTAGU, the pair
> Conspire to clear my dull, imprison'd sense,
> And chase the mists which dimm'd my visual beam.
> (ll. 45–50, in Fairer and Gerrard 2004)

Yearsley's writing does not always conform to the stereotypes imposed on it by More and later readers: she may not have been to school, but her brother taught her to read, and when she met More she knew works by Pope, Milton, and Shakespeare as well as some of the classics in translation. In 1793 she opened and ran a circulating library. Her writing may reflect her acute awareness of her position in society, but is also informed by the conventions of much eighteenth-century poetry, and, particularly in her later collections, refuses any easy identification with the ideal of the "unlettered poet" (see Waldron 1999).

"Clifton Hill *written in January 1785*" celebrates the landscape Yearsley knew best. The "visual beam" of her poetic imagination and her particular experience as a milk-woman combine to give un unusual doubled angle on the landscape, producing a prospect poem which could perhaps be compared to the even more telling insights into labor contained in Mary Leapor's "Crumble-Hall" (1751). Yearsley alternates between a conventional poetic voice, with which she distances herself from the "clumsy music" and "rough delight" of sailors on the River Avon (l. 191) –

> Yours be the vulgar dissonance, while I
> Cross the low stream, and stretch the ardent eye,
> O'er Nature's wilds; 'tis peace, 'tis joy serene,
> The thought as pure as calm the vernal scene.
> (ll. 192–5, in Fairer and Gerrard 2004)

– and an acknowledgment of her more physical encounter with the landscape and its animals: "half sunk in snow, / LACTILLA, shivering, tends her fav'rite cow" (ll. 19–20). Indeed, Yearsley celebrates a Pythagoraean sympathy between human beings and animals, a theme explored by other women poets in this period, as Margaret Anne Doody has demonstrated (Doody 1999). Here, typically, Yearsley distinguishes, as Anne Finch had done earlier from a very different subject position, her relation to the landscape from that of men:

> Ye bleating innocents! dispel your fears,
> My woe-struck soul in all your troubles shares;
> 'Tis but LACTILLA – fly not from the green:
> Long have I shar'd with you this guiltless scene.
> (ll. 106–9)

If "Clifton Hill" gains from Yearsley's ability to exploit her different subject positions, her poem "To Stella, on a Visit to Mrs Montagu" reveals an acute appreciation of the different degrees of connection enjoyed by herself and Montagu:

> I neither ask, nor own th'immortal name
> Of Friend; ah, no! its ardors are too great,
> My soul too narrow, and too low my state;
> STELLA! soar on, to nobler objects true,
> Pour out your soul with your lov'd MONTAGU;
> But, ah! shou'd either have a thought to spare,
> Slight, trivial, neither worth a smile or tear,
> Let it be mine.
> (ll. 2–9, in Fairer and Gerrard 2004)

Like the manipulation of poetic voice in the landscape poetry, this plea is knowing. Yearsley embodies the dichotomy between sophisticated poet and naïve and sentimental subject, conflating and prefiguring the subject positions later ventriloquized by Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads*.

Following the success of the collection, which raised £350, Yearsley felt that More, who with Montagu controlled the funds, mismanaged her earnings, and her bitter resentment led to a well-publicized rift. More's prefatory letter made clear that she had no intention of giving Yearsley either independence or the illusion that she could earn a living by her writing:

> It is not intended to place her in such a state of independence as might seduce her to devote her time to the idleness of Poetry. I hope she is convinced that the making of verses is not the great business of human life; and that as wife and mother, she has duties to fulfil, the smallest of which is of more value than the finest verses she can write. (Yearsley 1785: xi)

This assertion of domestic and familial duty is typical of More's writing, and suggests the continued need to stress that poetic labor should not replace the domestic.

"A British Muse"

Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743–1825), born Anna Aikin and brought up in the liberal intellectual circle of the nonconformist Warrington Academy where her father taught, was a prolific and accomplished writer. Encouraged by Joseph Priestley, she published a collection of poems in 1773. Later she published in the *Monthly Magazine*, wrote very popular children's literature, ran a school with her husband, and undertook such enormous editing and publishing projects as the fifty-volume *The British Novelists* (1810). The dissenting academy at Warrington provided a nurturing intellectual environment for Barbauld, and her poetry circulated among a group of family and friends prior to its wider publication. Daniel White has charted the circle's "familial mode of literary production characteristic of the Aikins and the national Dissenting community" (White 1999: 512), and points in particular to the practice whereby students left anonymous compositions in the workbag belonging to Joseph Priestley's wife Mary. Through this game, poetry written by Anna and others was simultaneously associated with domestic labor (through the workbag) and given a semi-public reading as it was disseminated among an enlarged familial and pedagogic circle before being published (White 1999: 519).

I want to look in some detail at two contrasting poems from Barbauld's first published collection: one public, "Corsica"; the other, "Washing Day," ostensibly domestic. Lonsdale describes a "striking confidence and authority" in Barbauld's *Poems* of 1773, and notes that "there was no female precedent for the accomplishment of the blank verse in her 'Corsica' " – a fact that alarmed her reviewer William Woodfall, who, while recognizing the poem's "smoothness and harmony, equal to that of our best poets," felt that she "trod too much in the footsteps of men" rather than being content with "feminine beauties" (Lonsdale 1989: xxxiii).

Written during the enthusiasm for Corsica's battle for independence from France, and inspired by, and drawing much of its detail from, James Boswell's *An Account of Corsica, The Journal of a Tour to that Island; and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli*, published in February 1768, Barbauld's 200-line poem exalts Corsica and its leader Paoli as a model of liberty. As in her later long poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, one of the features which marks Barbauld's style is the ability to negotiate between the large-scale and abstract, and minute detail. Given the date of the poem's composition, during the period of the "Wilkes and Liberty" campaign in England in 1768, the abstract quality of liberty is an ideal already manifest in contemporary British experience (Fairer and Gerrard 2004: 512). In the poem, Barbauld grounds liberty firmly in the physical detail of the Corsican landscape: "And glows the flame of LIBERTY so strong / In this lone speck of earth!" The evocation and personification of liberty is combined with almost forensic details

of Corsica's particular geography and flora. The details may come from Boswell, but they remind us of the richness of female poets' involvement in botanical writing in this period. "Corsica" deserves to be read alongside Charlotte Smith's "Beachy Head" (1807), which reads British political and natural history in parallel. Smith, who published *Conversations Introducing Poetry, Chiefly on Subjects of Natural History for the Use of Children and Young Persons* in 1804, was influenced by Barbauld's brother John Aikin's 1777 "Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry." Aikin described the relationship between natural history and poetry as mutually beneficial, bringing knowledge to a wider audience and improving "the most exalted and delightful of all arts, that of poetry" through the introduction of new forms of description motivated by the "searching and distinguishing eye" which could alleviate the experience of the "lover of poetry . . . wearied and disgusted with a perpetual repetition of the same images, clad in almost the same language" (Aikin 1777: 1–2; Grant 2003: xix–xxii).

A typical passage of "Corsica" is this, from the first third of the poem:

> Thy swelling mountains, brown with solemn shade
> Of various trees, that wave their giant arms
> O'er the rough sons of freedom; lofty pines,
> And hardy fir, and ilex ever green,
> And spreading chestnut, with each humbler plant,
> And shrub of fragrant leaf, that clothes their sides
> With living verdure; whence the clust'ring bee
> Extracts her golden dews: the shining box,
> And sweet-leav'd myrtle, aromatic thyme,
> The prickly juniper, and the green leaf
> Which feeds the spinning worm; while glowing bright
> Beneath the various foliage, wildly spreads
> The arbutus, and rears his scarlet fruit
> Luxuriant, mantling o'er the craggy steeps;
> And thy own native laurel crowns the scene.
> (ll. 48–62, in Fairer and Gerrard 2004)

While Barbauld was writing the poem, news broke that, contrary to earlier accounts of the Corsicans' success, they had in fact been defeated by the French. The poem breaks abruptly at line 183 and is resumed in a different mood. A series of short sentences contrasts with the preceding confidence with which she declared the pastoral after-effects of peace: "Then shall the shepherd's pipe, the muse's lyre, / On CYRNUS' shores be heard" (ll. 172–3). Barbauld had already introduced herself as an inadequate but enthusiastic muse earlier in the poem:

> Success to your fair hopes! a British muse,
> Tho' weak and powerless, lifts her fervent voice,
> And breathes a prayer for your success. Oh could

She scatter blessings as the morn sheds dews,
To drop upon your heads!
(ll. 133–7)

In this final section that rhetorical inadequacy is followed by a failure of communication – Corsica has fallen and the poem's optimism has been crushed:

So vainly wish'd, so fondly hop'd the Muse:
Too fondly hop'd: The iron fates prevail,
And CYRNUS is no more. Her generous sons,
Less vanquish'd than o'erwhelm'd, by numbers crush'd,
Admir'd, unaided fell.
(ll. 184–8)

Barbauld recoups the poem, if not the political situation, through a return to the language of traditional poetic observation: "So strives the moon / In dubious battle with the gathering clouds, / And strikes a splendour thro' them" (ll. 188–90), and the color purple, signifying both blood and imperial Rome. Her apology –

Forgive the zeal
That, too presumptuous, whisper'd better things
And read the book of destiny amiss
(ll. 192–4)

– is heartfelt, and facilitates the final move of the poem which, having precipitately celebrated political freedom, is forced to retreat instead to the abstract and the intellectual:

There yet remains a freedom, nobler far
Than kings or senates can destroy or give;
Beyond the proud oppressor's cruel grasp
Seated secure; uninjur'd; undestroy'd;
Worthy of Gods: The freedom of the mind.
(ll. 197–201)

Perhaps it is because Barbauld is "a British muse," who, by virtue of her gender, is "weak and powerless," that she can accomplish this relatively successful final turn to the abstract. The poem, having grounded the concept of liberty, personified and contrasted with luxury, in the particular ground of Corsica, is forced into a retreat which is, at least in part, facilitated by the poet's awareness of her doubled limitations as woman and English poet rather than one of the "rough sons of freedom" the poem offers as models for English lovers of liberty. It is after all, not merely Barbauld who has been unable to help Paoli: he "fell" "admir'd" but "unaided." There is then, in addition to a painful awareness of the poet's own limitations, a critique of English political apathy in relation to the Corsican struggle.

A later poem of Barbauld's, "Washing-Day" from 1797, provides a striking contrast with the scale and political aspirations of "Corsica." The poem is a conscious retreat to the feminine and the domestic, which, while initially apparently embracing the mock-heroic in good spirits, ends with a more painful sense of limitation. It opens with an appeal to the "domestic Muse," and a play on the embodiment of the muses, not as elevated contemporaries but as gossips, whose very poetic measures are "slipshod":

> The Muses are turned gossips; they have lost
> The buskined step, and clear high-sounding phrase,
> Language of gods. Come then, domestic Muse,
> In slipshod measure loosely prattling on
> Of farm or orchard, pleasant curds and cream,
> Or drowning flies, or shoe lost in the mire
> By little wimpering boy, with rueful face;
> Come, Muse, and sing the dreaded Washing-Day.
> (ll. 1–8, in Lonsdale 1989)

Through sympathy with the "red-armed washers" who rise before dawn (l. 15), the master who wants his coat "nicely dusted" (l. 35), and the guest who dreams in vain of "dinner of roast chicken, savoury pie, / Or tart or pudding" (ll. 51–2), the poem moves to specific memories of childhood. Here, recalling the treats of "buttered toast, / When butter was forbid" (ll. 64–5) and the "thrilling tale / Of ghost or witch, or murder" which were unforthcoming from the maids on washing day (ll. 65–6), Barbauld evokes the pleasures of childhood. The poem finds a moment of savored rest as the poet remembers retreating to the "parlour fire" and her "dear grandmother" who submitted to her grandchildren's teasing (ll. 67–8):

> Anxiously fond, though oft her spectacles
> With elfin cunning hid, and oft the pins
> Drawn from her ravelled stocking, might have soured
> One less indulgent.
> (ll. 70–3)

The moment is broken by "my mother's voice" "urging dispatch" (ll. 74–5) – and in two lines Barbauld gives a real sense of the number of tasks involved in washing in this period:

> All hands employed to wash, to rinse, to wring,
> To fold, and starch, and clap, and iron, and plait.
> (ll. 76–7)

Their physical activity prompts her reflections on "Why washings were" (l. 79). The poem ends with, in the last four lines, a dramatic scaling up toward the heroic in the form of a reference to Montgolfier's celebrated balloon rides of the 1780s, prompted

by the visual analogy of soap bubbles. This moment of liberation from the mundane toward the heroic achievements of the future is then, however, sharply curtailed as Barbauld registers, through the pun on the literal and the metaphorical "bubble," that this verse is particularly ephemeral:

> Sometimes through hollow bowl
> Of pipe amused we blew, and sent aloft
> The floating bubbles; little dreaming then
> To see, Montgolfier, thy silken ball
> Ride buoyant through the clouds – so near approach
> The sports of children and the toils of men.
> Earth, air, and sky, and ocean, hath its bubbles,
> And verse is one of them – this most of all.
> (ll. 79–86)

Perhaps part of the somewhat bitter ending is the awareness of the relative scale and pleasures of "the toils of men," which approach near the sports of children, but clearly transcend them in spectacular style in the case of Montgolfier, whereas the "work" (rather than the more poetic "toil") of women which the poem catalogues is always going to be menial, repetitive, and tedious. Finally, Barbauld's domestic Muse, given her topic, can only prattle to create an ephemeral "bubble."

"Washing-Day" shares with "Corsica" a pleasure in moving between the particular and the general, and an awareness of the effects of scale; but, unlike the earlier poem, it remains trapped by the constraints of its circumstances. If in "Corsica" Barbauld manages to enact a liberation of the mind which recoups, to a certain extent, the poetic labor expended in vain in her pre-emptive celebration of the island's liberation, here in "Washing-Day" the bubble bursts. Despite the flight of fancy briefly embodied by the vision of Montgolfier, domestic duty and the sheer weight of domestic labor crush the jaunty mock-heroics of the opening. The poem may remain a "bubble," but it, like earlier poems by laboring women, does make vivid the experience of a majority of women whose labor had, until this period, remained largely ignored by poetry.

See also chs. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"; 7, "Poetry, Popular Culture, and the Literary Marketplace"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 16, "Mary Leapor, 'Crumble-Hall'"; 31, "The Constructions of Femininity."

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9
Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility

Jennifer Keith

We expect poetry to engage our emotions; but the poetry that most overtly stimulates or, some might say, manipulates the reader's emotions is now among the least read. The poetry of sentiment or sensibility strives to evoke sympathy, prompting the reader to sympathize with the speaker's suffering or emulate the speaker's sympathy for another. Sensibility elevates emotional over intellectual power (Cox 1990: 64) and assumes that certain emotions are "benevolent, with positive moral and political effects for society" (Pinch 1996: 18). With the heightened emotional and sensory receptiveness associated with sensibility, William Cowper writes "My ear is pain'd, / My soul is sick with ev'ry day's report / Of wrong and outrage with which earth is fill'd" (*The Task*, ii. 5–7). But some readers in the eighteenth century and today have questioned whether the emotions stimulated by sensibility are either positive or socially efficacious. R. F. Brissenden has argued that "the deepest fantasy" of sentimental literature is that a person's "spontaneous moral responses . . . are necessarily reasonable" or benevolent (1974: 54). Some critics argue that such sympathizing may be a narcissistic exercise, enabling the reader who sympathizes to feel morally and aesthetically superior to the sufferer and to anyone incapable of feeling such sympathy. The poetry of sensibility thus brings to the fore debates about the quality of literary experience and its relation to moral and social behavior that concerned eighteenth-century writers and readers. These debates, in a different vocabulary, are still vital ones in the twenty-first century as we continue to explore the social role of literature's affective dimensions and to re-examine poetry's aesthetic qualities.

Part of what has been seen to corrupt the literature of sensibility is the way it directs the reader to gaze upon, and therefore objectify, the sufferer. Robert Markley describes this phenomenon as the "theatrics of virtue," where readers, characters, speakers, or audiences gaze on scenes of another's suffering, participating in a submerged sadism (1987). Many examples of the literature of sensibility, including anti-slavery literature, show this objectification of the oppressed (Rai 2002). The literature of sensibility can doubly incorporate spectacle: we watch the subject who bestows pity on the victim

observed. In Thomas Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1747), for example, the speaker feels for the children who must become adults: "Alas, regardless of their doom, / The little victims play!" (ll. 51–2). Often the oppressed person is a woman, such as Kate in Cowper's *The Task* (1785), a serving maid who "roams / The dreary waste" (i. 546–7), driven to madness and "never-ceasing sighs" (i. 552) since the death of her lover. Sentimental literature often repeats a gendered plot from romance, where an active male character rescues – or at least pities – feminine "Virtue in Distress" (Brissenden 1974).

Although such a plot lends itself to the male poet-subject and male reader, a great number of women read and wrote poems of sensibility in the eighteenth century. Indeed, one of the most important characteristics of eighteenth-century poetry is the increasing participation of writers from this category of "Virtue in Distress," which develops concurrently with the culture of sensibility: men and women, some of them poor, some of them slaves such as Phillis Wheatley, wrote poetry that engaged the values of sensibility. That is, the so-called "victims" themselves wrote. Although numerous poems of sensibility seem to indulge the reader's and writer's exercise of compassion instead of social action, there are many other examples where the poetry of sensibility attempts to expand the reader's consciousness of others' suffering to build an emotional foundation for social reform. Thus, in contrast to some poems that objectify the sufferer, others provide alternatives to the gaze, inviting the reader to engage figuratively and aurally with representations of the oppressed (cf. Keith 2005). Not only do some of the more complex poems of sensibility block the reader's gaze, they also enlist a range of tones that complicate readers' responses. Poetry of sensibility can elicit readers' sympathy to test new notions of Virtue that lie outside social norms.

According to some scholars, the increasing interest in sensibility in the eighteenth century supported social and economic shifts. Markman Ellis, for example, describes how sensibility helped define the "emergent consumer-economy of British society and culture" (1996: 17). Sentiment, argues Paul Langford, expressed the "middle-class need for a code of manners which challenged aristocratic ideals and fashions," part of a general transformation in defining gentility (1989: 461). This era needed sensibility to help define individual action and social reform in the increasingly consumer-centered economy (Langford 1989: 464). Paul Goring has analyzed the rhetoric of sensibility that shapes "how a body should appear and behave in public" (2005: 7). In contrast to approaches that see the culture of sensibility as re-forming the body to suit changes in eighteenth-century society, John Mullan has argued that the effects of sensibility are so ambivalent, including sensibility's associations with privilege *and* weakness, virtue *and* madness, that its ideological functions may be difficult to determine: literature of sensibility may have disrupted as much as it served social structures (1988: 236). Privileging the ideal individual as tender-hearted, sensibility bestowed a quality previously seen as "feminine" upon men and established men as the best practitioners of sympathy. Men, it was argued, had greater rational powers to balance and shape these impulses of the heart, and so were better able than women

to produce literature of sensibility. G. J. Barker-Benfield has analyzed the culture of sensibility as a "feminizing" influence (1992: xvii–xviii), while other critics have addressed its "masculinizing" influence: Claudia L. Johnson argues that the characteristics of sensibility "are valued not because they are understood as feminine, but precisely and only insofar as they have been recoded as masculine" (1995: 14). According to George E. Haggerty, the culture of sensibility permits the expression of male homosexual desire (1999: 114).

Although some scholars have seen the poetry of sentiment or sensibility as emerging in the middle of the eighteenth century, more recently others have seen a longer continuum, reaching back not only to some of Pope's work but also to that of women and men writing in the seventeenth century. George S. Rousseau maintains that sensibility could not have emerged before the end of the seventeenth century because sensibility's emphasis on "the self-conscious personality" and the body as a conduit of compassion required certain models of the nervous system available only in the last decades of the seventeenth century (2004: 175, 178). The literature of sensibility, observes David Fairer, develops the early modern attention to introspective melancholy in relation to Locke's focus on sensory perception (2003: 112). With roots in seventeenth-century science, philosophy, and the dissenting traditions, the literature of sensibility relied heavily on benevolism as articulated especially by Shaftesbury in the eighteenth century. Sensibility may be traced to pathos and sensation as far back as Euripides, as well as in medieval morality plays, and Elizabethan and Jacobean drama (Todd 1986: 3). Drawing on a long-established discourse of the heart (Van Sant 1993: 4, 11), sensibility develops the ancient connection between knowing and feeling that recurs in "the trope of the 'thinking heart,' an important alternate paradigm to that of the thinking brain from the ancient world through the early modern period" (Erickson 1997: 20). Images of this convergence of feeling and thinking occur in the tradition of devotional poetry. Nicolas Billingsley's "On Contrition" (1667) defines contrition as "The renting, or the pricking of the heart / For sin, a sensibility of smart" (ll. 3–4). This "heart consciousness" has its variation later in the eighteenth century in Charles Wesley's "For a Tender Conscience." The speaker asks "Almighty God" to give him "A sensibility of sin" (l. 11) so that he may "mourn for the minutest fault / In exquisite distress" (ll. 31–2).

Such wide-ranging origins suggest the complexity of sentiment and sensibility, perhaps corresponding to the unsystematic use of these two terms. According to Van Sant, "*sensibility* and *sentimental* are in one respect easy to separate: sensibility is associated with the body, sentiment with the mind. The first is based on physical sensitivity and the processes of sensation; the second refers to a refinement of thought" (1993: 4). Other scholars contend that the terms are so closely allied that eighteenth-century writers often use them interchangeably (Barker-Benfield 1992: xvii). In this essay I use *sensibility* to include the overlapping category of sentiment as I analyze how writers used *poetry* in particular to stimulate the reader's senses, feelings, reason, and social consciousness.

Whether using *sentiment* or *sensibility*, some writers and readers were vexed by questions about the sincerity of the feelings represented. Eighteenth-century readers' suspicions about the sincerity of the literature of sympathy are echoed in today's negative connotations of *sentimental* (Todd 1986: 8). Anne Finch's "The Spleen" (1701) addresses this feigning of cultivated emotional sensitivity – especially the sensitivity to one's own suffering. The person with spleen cultivates "whisper'd Griefs" and hears "fancy'd Sorrows" (l. 48). At the end of the century, in *The Village* (1783), George Crabbe still chastises those of false sensibility "opprest by some fantastic woes" (i. 252). At the center of Finch's poem, however, is the speaker's own authentic "spleen" – her introspective melancholy and heightened sensibility:

> I feel my Verse decay, and my crampt Numbers fail.
> Through thy black Jaundies I all Objects see,
> As dark and terrible as thee;
> My Lines decry'd, and my Implayment thought
> An useless Folly, or presumptuous Fault;
> While in the Muses Paths I stray.
> While in their Groves, and by their Springs,
> My Hand delights to trace unusual things,
> And deviates from the known and common way.
> (ll. 76–84)

Here the speaker's suffering is inseparable from her poetry: the spleen corrupts her verse and her perception of all around her. While the spleen feeds her insecurities about her writing, under the influence of the spleen her writing becomes "unusual," suggesting the originality that will come to define poetic merit later in the century. Although Finch uses the older term *spleen* to describe properties that will be modified to describe sensibility, her poem shows the deep relations between the sensitive self and artistic character that will become increasingly explicit in the century.

Writers of sensibility often insist that only a few can truly experience it. Thomas Warton in *The Pleasures of Melancholy* (1747) announces: "Few know that elegance of soul refin'd, / Whose soft sensation feels a quicker joy / From Melancholy's scenes" (ll. 92–4). To convince the reader of the authenticity of these feelings, writers increasingly articulated the individuality of the poet-speaker. Thus, one of the key examples of Virtue in Distress is the writer (Brissenden 1974: 77). A far cry from satirical attacks on Grub Street "hacks," these portraits focus sympathetically on writers' suffering. Even Pope adopts this position, not only in his more overtly sentimental poems such as "Eloisa to Abelard" and "Elegy to . . . an Unfortunate Lady" but also in his satirical works, as in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*. Thomas Gray's isolated youth of sensibility in *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard* (1751) invites our sympathy for the sympathy he gives: "He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear" (l. 123). Oliver Goldsmith in *The Deserted Village* (1770) catalogues a series of suffering persons and things – widows, wounded soldiers, the village itself, and the land – before he settles on the poet himself as deserving our sympathy. Bidding Poetry adieu, the poet describes

her as “source of all my bliss, and all my woe, / That found’st me poor at first, and keep’st me so” (ll. 415–16).

Some portraits of the artist as Virtue in Distress depict women poets. In “Upon the saying that my Verses were made by another” (1686), Anne Killigrew describes her state of heightened sensibility – “What pleasing Raptures fill’d my Ravisht Sense” (l. 17) – followed by her readers denying her credit for writing her poems. This she describes as a kind of rape (see Straub 1987):

> What ought t’have brought me Honour, brought me shame!
> Like *Esops* Painted Jay I seem’d to all,
> Adorn’d in Plumes, I not my own could call:
> Rifl’d like her, each one my Feathers tore,
> And, as they thought, unto the Owner bore.
> My Laurels thus an Others Brow adorn’d,
> My Numbers they Admir’d, but Me they scorn’d.
> (ll. 34–40)

Frequently the poet-speaker establishes the genuineness of her suffering by begging *not* to feel. A century after Killigrew’s poem, Ann Yearsley’s “To Indifference” (1787) commands Indifference to “come! thy torpid juices shed / On my keen sense: plunge deep my wounded heart, / In thickest apathy. . . .” (ll. 1–3). The speaker comes to terms with this unbearable sensibility by appreciating it as an exercise in Virtue:

> VIRTUE never lives,
> But in the bosom, struggling with its wound:
> *There* she supports the conflict, *there* augments
> The pang of *hopeless Love*, the senseless stab
> Of gaudy Ign’rance, and more deeply drives
> The poison’d dart, hurl’d by the long-lov’d friend;
> *Then* pants, with painful Victory.
> (ll. 16–22)

Based on the emotional depths of the self, virtue lies in this very consciousness of one’s feeling – even if this results in self-pity.

Poems that feature the speaker’s own anguish typically rely on personifications to articulate this emotion. Yearsley’s “To Indifference” addresses personified Indifference while apparently proceeding to detail the speaker’s sensibility. In fact, to make the speaker’s emotions social and visible the poem relies on a series of personifications: Virtue, Love, Ignorance, and Victory. Some of the most powerful visual images in the eighteenth century appear in poems of sensibility that, rather than requiring readers to gaze upon the sufferer, invite them to “see” personifications. For most twenty-first-century readers, personifications seem empty capitalized nouns, but to eighteenth-century readers they were considered powerful stimulants to sensory experience (Rothstein 1981: 68). In *Elements of Criticism* (1762), Henry Home, Lord Kames,

describes these intense sensory responses to poetic imagery, especially personification, as "ideal presence"; producing almost a state of hallucination, such language "can make the reader forget that he or she is holding a book, and instead 'conceive every incident as passing in his presence, precisely as if he were an eyewitness' (7th edn, 1788, 1: 91–3)" (Rothstein 1981: 69). This imaginative response to personifications underscored "a certain social kinship" (Rothstein 1981: 100) among readers that countered the focus on individual pain. This social kinship appears in Charlotte Smith's "Sonnet: To Fancy" (1789), where the poet hopes to free herself from both the beautiful and the painful scenes of Fancy. By using personification to describe her grief for lost pleasures – "pale Experience hangs her head / O'er the sad grave of murder'd Happiness" (ll. 7–8) – Smith embodies her emotions in Experience and Happiness, personifications that appeal to imaginative readers as expressing their pain too (see Pinch 1996).

To make ideas into persons, to enlist the reader's capacity to see them in the mind's eye, puts flesh and blood on what could otherwise seem empty abstractions. Thus, personification links images of persons with important concepts circulating in the culture. Rather than gaze upon a single victim of poverty or slavery, for example, the reader sees Poverty or Slavery in a double vision of idea and person that links individual and society. As the trope that extends a realm of private experience to the public, personification *is* sensibility.

The aesthetic distinctiveness of the most innovative poems of sensibility lies in this use of personification with heightened sound patterns, creating an intimacy between the reader and sufferer. Fairer's description of the text of sensibility as "a kind of performance of intimacy" aptly reminds us of the importance of the reader's sensory experiences in this poetry (2003: 223). In his essay "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," Northrop Frye characterized the literature of sensibility "as process, being based on an irregular and unpredictable coincidence of sound-patterns" (1956: 148). "There is in souls a sympathy with sounds," Cowper explains:

> And as the mind is pitch'd the ear is pleas'd
> With melting airs or martial, brisk or grave.
> Some chord in unison with what we hear
> Is touch'd within us, and the heart replies.
> (*The Task*, vi. 1–5)

Alert to these sound qualities, we indeed experience the poetry of sensibility as developing aural connections that dissolve the distance of the gaze. Through these aural qualities the reader participates in an unfolding sensory experience. This approach, argues Jerome McGann, does more than heighten poetry's inevitable attention to sound structures: it involves rethinking the "structure and resources of language, in particular poetical language" (1996: 23). On the one hand, McGann argues, such a revolution in poetic language provides the possibility for other kinds of revolution, where the less educated may be seen as having more immediate access to the English

tongue, including its dialects: "If one aspires to an effective emotional expression, 'Writing Incorrectly' becomes a poetic *sine qua non*" (pp. 43, 45). On the other hand, such a linguistic revolution risks abandoning social concerns by privileging the signifier over the signified (p. 23).

Such a fascination with language appears in Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*, where "there is a language of flowers" (Fragment B503) and "every word has its marrow in the English tongue for order and for delight" (Fragment B595). Thomas Chatterton makes English strange and sensuous in his forgeries known as the Rowley poems. In "Bristowe Tragedie or the Dethe of Syr Charles Bawdin" (1772), the brave warrior asks:

> "How dydd I knowe thatt ev'ry darte
> "Thatt cutte the airie waie
> "Myghte notte fynde passage toe my harte
> "And close myne eyes for aie?
> (ll. 133–6)

Such language of the heart makes Chatterton's forgery a powerful example of genuine sensibility. Experimenting with sound and visual imagery, Christian Carstairs unfolds the process of perceiving and feeling for the Other in her brief poem "Nightingale" (1786):

> O! could my sweet plaint lull to rest,
> Soften one sigh – as thou dreamst,
> I'd sit the whole night on thy tree,
> And sing, – – sing, – –
> With the thorn at my breast.

With an obliqueness that prefigures Emily Dickinson's, this poem invites us to see the heart pressed by pain, giving us little else in visual imagery or context. Poets and nightingales, Anne Finch reminds us, sing best with their breasts "plac'd against a Thorn" ("To the Nightingale," 1713). In Carstairs's poem, speaker and bird appear together, the image of one eclipsing the other and vice versa. Although the speaker never tells precisely who suffers or from what, she would endure the thorn at her breast to relieve it. We would hardly describe this poem as making a spectacle of suffering. Rather, its restrained visual imagery combines with sound structures to involve the reader in deepest plangency. With *plaint*, *lull*, *sigh*, and *sing*, the poet underscores this work as music, and her tumultuous meter recreates the speaker's agony in the reader who speaks these words aloud.

By emphasizing profound aural experiences and inviting the reader to see persons in ideas and emotions, clearly some poems of sensibility refute the charge that they make a spectacle of the sufferer. But the related criticism leveled against sensibility is that it cultivates the reader's self-satisfaction rather than social reform. While this accurately characterizes some of the poetry, a number

of poems of sensibility exhibit a tonal range that complicates our conclusions about the reader's complacency. What of poems that include elements that may alienate readers? Poems of sensibility can have a wide range of tones and qualities, even the seemingly antithetical strains of sentiment and satire, as Fairer has demonstrated (2003: 75). Samuel Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes* reminds us of how intimately sensibility and satire intertwine. Sympathizing with the oppressed, readers may also be stirred to anger against the forces of oppression and moved to act.

Let us consider, for example, poems that present women's tribulations while including what today we would call a critique of patriarchy. Finch's "The Unequal Fetters" (*c.*1702) compassionately depicts the lot of women in marriage. But the speaker defiantly describes the loss of liberty in marriage "by subtle Man's invention" (l. 13). Women should not "Yeild to be in Fetters bound / By one that walks a freer round" (ll. 14–15). The poem concludes with the rueful image of one slave oppressing another more severely restricted:

Marriage does but slightly tye Men
Whil'st close Pris'ners we remain
They the larger Slaves of Hymen
Still are begging Love again
At the full length of all their chain.
(ll. 16–20)

Finch interweaves sympathy with satire, encouraging readers to leaven compassion with judgment. In Sarah Fyge Egerton's "The Liberty" (1703), the speaker flaunts her rejection of restraints upon women, declaring her independence from the suffering that Custom exerts over her sex:

Not chain'd to the nice Order of my Sex,
And with restraints my wishing Soul perplex:
I'll blush at Sin, and not what some call Shame,
Secure my Virtue, slight precarious Fame.
(ll. 45–8)

Like Finch's poem, Egerton's relies on images of slavery to attack cultural restraints on women. Rather than cultivate the narcissistic pleasures of sympathy, Egerton may either inflame her readers or enlarge their notions of Virtue. The anger that fuels Egerton's and Finch's social critiques is a feature that Spacks identifies as an important, if overlooked, aspect of sensibility (2001: 250).

In its concerns for the sufferings of the poor and slaves, literature of sensibility clearly enlists Enlightenment notions of equality – but such notions typically have their limits. Consider the differences in tone among three accounts of the lives of laborers. Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard* (1751) evokes pity for the constrained lives of the poor:

> Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
> Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire,
> Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
> Or wak'd to extasy the living lyre.
>
> (ll. 45–8)

Well before Gray elicited readers' sympathy for these laborers, Stephen Duck in *The Thresher's Labour* (1730) presented their sufferings. Himself a thresher, Duck opens the poem with praise for his patron's encouragement of Duck's muse, bidding "her 'midst her Poverty rejoice" (l. 6). Duck exposes the brutal experience of the threshers that gives the lie to pastoral poetry:

> In briny Streams our Sweat descends apace,
> Drops from our Locks, or trickles down our Face.
> No intermission in our Works we know;
> The noisy Threshall must for ever go.
> . . .
> Can we, like Shepherds, tell a merry Tale?
> The Voice is lost, drown'd by the noisy Flail.
>
> (ll. 44–7, 52–3)

Although he pays lip-service to the social hierarchy, Duck's exposure of the laborers' work is capable of stirring compassion for them and anger at economic inequities. In a far more combative tone that compares women's labor, mocked by Duck, with men's, Mary Collier further challenges the tonal boundaries of sensibility by replacing condescension with indignation. In *The Woman's Labour* (1739) the poet figures herself and other women as slaves, citing a distant golden age when women were respected. Addressing Duck, she counters that today "on our abject State you throw your Scorn, / And Women wrong, your Verses to adorn" (ll. 41–2). The graphically depicted suffering that Collier and other washerwomen endure may stir horror, outrage, compassion, or all three:

> Not only Sweat, but Blood runs trickling down
> Our Wrists and Fingers; still our Work demands
> The constant Action of our lab'ring Hands.
>
> (ll. 185–7)

In Gray's poem, virtue lies in the unfulfilled potential of the poor and the youth of great sensibility who pauses to pity them. Duck's poem lauds the virtue of "manly" physical labor while declaring respect for the hierarchy men serve and placing women's labor at the bottom of this hierarchy. Collier's poem boldly asserts the virtue of women's labor – an active virtue that demands an assertive tone.

The complex and varied models of virtue in this poetry may not have immediately effected social reform, but they certainly shaped cultural values, at times solidifying and at other times shifting standards for morality and gender decorum. In Pope's

poems most often associated with sensibility, "Eloisa to Abelard" and "Elegy to . . . an Unfortunate Lady," female sexual passion is central to the virtue he explores. Eloisa, Jean Hagstrum has argued, achieves "permanent dignity and identity as a rebellious and passionate woman. . . . the poem represents at once a high point in the development of *sensibilité*" (1980: 121). In "Elegy to . . . an Unfortunate Lady," Pope begins with the image of the "Lady's" bleeding heart as he asks, "Is it, in heav'n, a crime to love too well?" (l. 6),

> To bear too tender, or too firm a heart,
> To act a Lover's or a *Roman*'s part?
> Is there no bright reversion in the sky,
> For those who greatly think, or bravely die?
> Why bade ye else, ye Pow'rs! her soul aspire
> Above the vulgar flight of low desire?
> (ll. 7–12)

Contemplating the woman's high desires that end in suicide, the poet compares them with his own yearnings above the "vulgar":

> Poets themselves must fall, like those they sung;
> Deaf the prais'd ear, and mute the tuneful tongue.
> Ev'n he, whose soul now melts in mournful lays,
> Shall shortly want the gen'rous tear he pays;
> Then from his closing eyes thy form shall part,
> And the last pang shall tear thee from his heart. . . .
> (ll. 75–80)

In this model of sensibility, feminine Virtue in distress ends its agony by suicide. But in other examples of feminine Virtue, female desire lives on and suffers. The constraints on women's romantic and sexual passions (whether enforced by fathers, brothers, or future husbands) should be understood as one of the kinds of social oppression that some poets of sensibility hoped to make their readers understand. Significantly, at the end of the elegy and of "Eloisa to Abelard," Pope takes pains to show his sympathy for and similarity with these women. Whether satirical or sentimental, his poems typically close with a return to the poet's position: modest, moral, and experienced in suffering.

Sexual desire frequently emerges in the charged atmosphere of sensibility, as Hagstrum and Barker-Benfield have observed. In "Clifton Hill" (1785), Anne Yearsley includes an extended passage on the historical person Louisa whose character reminds us of Pope's Eloisa. After recalling her own relation to Clifton Hill, the speaker turns to the story of Louisa, described thus in a footnote by the poet:

> The beautiful unfortunate LOUISA, fugitive Foreigner, lived three years in a state of distraction under this hay-stack, without going into a house. She once confessed, in a

> lucid interval, that she had escaped from a Convent, in which she had been confined by her father, on refusing a marriage of his proposing, her affections being engaged to another man.

Fairer and Gerrard add that "Louisa (d. 1800) was a German fugitive, for whom Hannah More raised and administered a subscription, having her removed to a private asylum" (2004: 488n.). Yearsley attends to Louisa (and by extension her predecessor Eloisa) as a woman who suffers at the hands of her parents because of her desire for a man. Such parental control Yearsley calls those "human laws [that] are harshly given, / When they extend beyond the will of Heaven" (ll. 228–9). Louisa was confined in a convent for her "guiltless joys" (l. 232). Such "Monastic glooms . . . active virtue cramp" (l. 234), bringing her to a state of living death: "Slowly and faint the languid pulses beat, / And the chill'd heart forgets its genial heat" (ll. 236–7). Yearsley's reference to "active virtue" briefly suggests an alternative to Louisa's suffering and her ensuing madness. Louisa escapes to England, only to be overcome (like Eloisa) by her feelings of guilt and longing for the man she loves:

> Too late to these mild shores the mourner came,
> For now the guilt of flight o'erwhelms her frame:
> Her broken vows in wild disorder roll,
> And stick like serpents in her trembling soul.
> (ll. 277–80)

Louisa's sensibility brings her to madness, which Yearsley conveys most remarkably by addressing a personification:

> THOUGHT, what art thou? of thee she boasts no more,
> O'erwhelm'd, thou dy'st amid the wilder roar
> Of lawless anarchy, which sweeps the soul,
> Whilst her drown'd faculties like pebbles roll,
> Unloos'd, uptorn, by whirlwinds of despair,
> Each well-taught moral now dissolves in air;
> Dishevel'd, lo! her beauteous tresses fly,
> And the wild glance now fills the staring eye.
> (ll. 281–8)

Long before the madwoman in the nineteenth-century attic, the madwoman of eighteenth-century sensibility appears. Yearsley's description is powerful: addressing personified Thought from the perspective of madness – "what art thou?" – the poet turns to the disordered psyche of Louisa. Amorphous images of Louisa's turmoil prevent the reader from objectifying her: Louisa's "faculties like pebbles roll, / Unloos'd, uptorn, by whirlwinds of despair." Through such imagery Yearsley represents Louisa's transgression of sexual chastity as achieving a magnitude of suffering associated with heroic virtue.

Similar images of the woman destroyed by desire appear in Anna Seward's sonnet "To the Poppy" (probably written 1789; published 1799). The speaker, characterizing herself as "Misfortune's victim" (l. 3), addresses "Thee, scarlet Poppy of the pathless field" (l. 4). Personified, the flower is already a woman, and the woman, in turn, is already the flower:

> Gaudy, yet wild and lone; no leaf to shield
> Thy flaccid vest, that, as the gale blows high,
> Flaps, and alternate folds around thy head. –
> So stands in the long grass a love-craz'd maid,
> Smiling aghast; while stream to every wind
> Her garish ribbons, smear'd with dust and rain;
> But brain-sick visions cheat her tortured mind,
> And bring false peace. Thus, lulling grief and pain,
> Kind dreams oblivious from thy juice proceed,
> Thou flimsy, showy, melancholy Weed.
> (ll. 5–14)

Seward's flower-woman stands in a neglected field, but the reader "sees" her suffering through intimate figurative vision, where petals suggest female genitalia and in turn the woman either damaged by her own sexual desire or raped. This figurative picture of the woman-flower in distress combines a range of tones often ignored by detractors of sensibility. The speaker's tone of compassionate horror turns in the final line to contempt. In this figurative vision that fluctuates between flower and woman, Seward conveys the female character's vertiginous moral position and the speaker's shifting tone toward the intoxicating flower and the woman's violation of moral norms. Thus, the poet eerily reproduces the cultural restrictions on women's sexuality and access to sensibility. Women, Seward's contemporaries argued, were vulnerable to overstimulation, driving them to pursue sexual desires or leaving them in a state of madness – that is, driving them to anything but the production of great art (Barker-Benfield 1992: xvii–xviii).

Readers', speakers', and writers' attitudes in such poems can be far from certain, despite the conventional assumptions by critics that these poems enlist sympathy and attempt to promote social reform. Joseph Warton's "The Dying Indian" (1755) offers an example of a complex relation between reader and sufferer. The poem would seem to participate in the era's fascination with the "noble savage," seeking to inspire the reader's sympathy and admiration for the dying man. But, if so, the poem also asks the reader to overlook or accept radically different cultural values (even though Warton's orientalism distorts that culture). Wounded by a poisoned arrow, the dying Indian envisions arriving in a paradise that combines orientalized pastoral with violence,

> where anana's bloom
> Thrice in each moon; where rivers smoothly glide,
> Nor thundering torrents whirl the light canoe

> Down to the sea; where my forefathers feast
> Daily on hearts of Spaniards!
>
> (ll. 4–8)

While clearly the poem attacks Spanish conquerors and Catholicism, the speaker uses the more general term "christian" rather than "Catholic" to condemn his enemy. The Indian instructs his son to kill his mother

> when disease
> Preys on her languid limbs, then kindly stab her
> With thine own hands, nor suffer her to linger,
> Like christian cowards, in a life of pain.
>
> (ll. 22–5)

Despite his orientalizing of the "Indian," Warton strives to preserve the speaker's difference in conveying such anti-Christian elements. In its structure, this poem, "judged to be the earliest dramatic monologue" (Fairer and Gerrard 2004: 391), clearly contributes to reproducing the views of the other while challenging contemporary British values.

The complexity of representing the Other appears in William Collins's "Ode to Evening" (1747), where the speaker must *change* to address the Other. Collins's speaker strives to become the condition of Evening/Eve without violating "her":

> Now teach me, Maid compos'd,
> To breathe some soften'd strain,
> Whose numbers stealing thro' thy darkning vale,
> May not unseemly with its stillness suit. . . .
>
> (ll. 15–18)

Dealing with neither social ills nor an oppressed person, Collins uses incantatory sounds and personification to explore how the self might come to know and even be that which it is not. To understand and represent Evening requires that the speaker surrender to this other mode of being; but Collins's composed and chaste feminine Evening emphasizes idealized notions of female virtue in contrast to Seward's anguished and sexualized feminine Poppy. In spite of its conservative idealization of the feminine, "Ode to Evening" explores an apparently asocial relationship where the practice of radical sympathy could have powerful effects if applied to victims of social injustice.

To imagine another's experience, especially suffering, is nothing less than to change the nation's fate in Mary Barber's poem "On seeing an Officer's Widow distracted, who had been driven to Despair, by a long and fruitless Solicitation for the Arrears of her Pension" (1734). In apocalyptic language, Barber warns Britain that if it does not respond to the suffering of soldiers' widows and orphans the land will be punished by pestilence or famine. Such a poem assumes the centrifugal movement of sensibility

described by Fairer, where consciousness and social conscience spread from individual persons to the nation (2003: 235). The poetry of sensibility assumes that feelings impel social and political action. Sensibility's most aesthetically and ideologically challenging poets yoke form and content so that readers can begin to sense what was previously outside their care.

See also chs. 4, "Poetry and Religion"; 11, "Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* and 'Eloisa to Abelard'"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 20, "Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*"; 22, "Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*, and George Crabbe, *The Village*"; 31, "The Constructions of Femininity."

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PART II
Readings

10
John Gay, *The Shepherd's Week*

Mina Gorji

The Shepherd's Week opens with a squabble. Two lovesick shepherds, Cuddy and Lobbin Clout, bicker and trade insults:

> CUDDY
> Hold, witless *Lobbin Clout*, I thee advise,
> Lest Blisters sore on thy own Tongue arise.
> (ll. 19–20)

The row soon turns into a singing contest in which the rustics quarrel over whose love is truer, and whose sweetheart more beautiful. Each tries to trump the other in similes that are increasingly ridiculous: Cuddy's sweetheart, Blouzelinda, has breath "sweeter than the ripen'd Hay" (l. 76), but Lobbin's Buxoma's airs "excell'd the breathing cows" (l. 82). Cloddipole, the wise "lout" (l. 22) appointed to judge the contest, is soon wearied by these discordant "strains" (l. 129); he declares a draw and calls matters bluntly to a close. The witty and "courteous" reader to whom *The Shepherd's Week* is addressed would quickly recognize the literary origins of this rustic squabble: Virgil's third eclogue begins with a dispute between two herdsmen, Menalcas and Damoetas, and concludes in a singing competition that ends in a draw. Yet although Gay's lines follow the narrative structure of Eclogue 3, his coarse language is out of key with the simple elegance of its ancient original. The poem is animated by such antipathies, elements of a tonal and generic instability that is characteristic of Gay's best-known work, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), which artfully mingles pathos, bathos, and lampoon. Throughout *The Shepherd's Week*, the vulgar and the sophisticated, the high and the low collide: country matters of fact are juxtaposed with mock-learned references; studied archaisms such as *welkin* and *eftsoons* jostle against colloquial banter; and in the poem's footnotes, definitions of uncouth dialect sit awkwardly beside sophisticated Latin and Greek quotations. Gay's swains and shepherdesses have names that yoke rusticity to polish: Hobnelia, Clumsilis, Grubbinol, and Bumkinet sound both

Latinate and rustic, clownish and classical. This artful mingling is also characteristic of the poem's sources: Gay adopts and adapts the classical eclogue form (the eclogue was a short pastoral poem, often structured as a dialogue); but as well as alluding to classical poetry, he also draws on English popular culture – ballads, folk airs, and proverbial phrases – and as a result the poem is an artfully incongruous hotchpotch of popular and polite literature.

It is particularly appropriate that *The Shepherd's Week* should open with a rustic squabble since it takes its impetus from a dispute between Gay's friend and fellow Scriblerian Alexander Pope and the Whig poet Ambrose Philips over the merits of their respective pastorals. It was, according to Pope, to the "management of Philips that the world owes Mr Gay's pastorals" (Pope 1956: vol. 1, p. 229). As Brean Hammond notes [*see* ch. 27, "Verse Satire"], pastoral was a genre "coming under serious scrutiny" in the early eighteenth century. Prominent writers argued over the correct bucolic style and debated how ancient pastoral models, Theocritus' *Idylls* and Virgil's *Eclogues*, should best be adapted into English. Where should modern pastorals be set – in a real British countryside or in a timeless classical Arcadia? Should poets seek to idealize rural life, or try instead to offer a more faithful account? Should shepherds speak with polished simplicity or adopt more authentic country accents? Gay's *The Shepherd's Week*, a series of six rural eclogues (one for each day of the working week) engages with and emerges from such contemporary debates.

The pastoral quarrel between Pope and Philips took place in the periodicals and coffee-houses of literary London, public arenas for cultural debate and polite conversation that were emerging at the start of the eighteenth century. The dispute had its origins in the pages of Jacob Tonson's *Poetical Miscellanies, The Sixth Part* (May 2, 1709), in which both poets had published (very different) sets of pastorals. Pope's eclogues, following the principles he had set out in his "Discourse on Pastoral," idealized bucolic life and presented a "Golden Age" whose pastures were peopled with classical swains allusively styled after Virgil's Daphnis, Alexis, and Strephon. Philips's pastorals are patterned after Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* and were firmly rooted in the English countryside. Whereas Pope's shepherds speak with elegant simplicity, Philips's swains have rougher accents, thickened with archaism and dialect.

What might seem to be minor stylistic differences took on wider significance in the increasingly factious literary world of the early eighteenth century. Writers vied for political patronage: Pope's sympathies lay with the Tory party, and his allies included Gay, Swift, and Arbuthnot; those writers who supported the Whig party were known as the "little senate," and regularly gathered at Button's coffee-house in Covent Garden. This côterie, to which Philips himself belonged, included Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and Thomas Tickell. Philips had dedicated his pastorals to a prominent Whig politician, Lionel Cranfield, Earl of Dorset, and they were puffed by the Whig periodicals: Steele praised Philips's poems in *The Tatler*, no. 10 (1709), and Addison applauded them in *The Spectator*, nos. 223, 400, and 523. But it was in the pages of *The Guardian* that the rumbling pastoral quarrel gathered real momentum.

In the spring of 1713, five essays penned by Tickell, arguing for a revival of the English pastoral tradition, were published anonymously in *The Guardian*. Careful readers may have noted that the first of these essays (no. 22) opened with exactly the same Virgilian epigraph Pope had used to introduce his series of pastorals. But despite this studied coincidence, Tickell neglected Pope and instead lavished praise on Philips's eclogues; he commended their "authentic" description of rural innocence which let the "Tranquility" of rural life "appear full and plain," but hid its "Meanness," and covered its "Misery" (*Guardian* 1982: 106; see Nokes 1987: 124).

Angered by Tickell's pointed neglect of his own poems, Pope enlisted Gay's help and penned another "anonymous" essay on pastoral, which he tricked Steele into publishing in no. 40 of *The Guardian*. In this spoof essay, which appeared in April 1713, Pope impersonated Tickell and paid ironic homage to Philips's rustic authenticity, but his compliments were so extravagant that they appeared ridiculous. Apologizing for having ignored Pope's pastorals in his earlier discussions, he went on to make direct comparisons between his own elegant couplets and the clumsiest passages from Philips. He argued (tongue firmly in cheek) that, judged against the standard set by Philips's pastorals, even Virgil fell short: his third eclogue, for example, contained "Calumny and Railing" which was "not proper to that State of Concord" expected of pastoral. Elsewhere, he explains, Virgil's language was too "perfectly pure," and his style "too Courtly" in comparison with Philips's "beautiful rusticity." "[I]t will appear," he concluded, archly, "that *Virgil* can only have two of his *Eclogues* allowed to be [called] such" (*Guardian* 1982: 160). According to Tickell (no. 30), Philips had artfully adapted ancient models in the light of native scenery and custom, proving that Britain was "a proper Scene for Pastoral" (*Guardian* 1982: 128). A single detail afforded Pope an opportunity to puncture this claim: although wolves appear in Philips's pastorals, they were no longer native to England (*Guardian* 1982: 161).

When Philips learned of the attack, he hung up a rod in Button's coffee-house and threatened to use it on Pope if he ever entered the premises. Gay rallied to Pope's defense and composed *The Shepherd's Week*. But although the poem was ostensibly written to support Pope and parody Philips, it is more complex and subtle than a mere piece of literary burlesque, embodying the tensions between "high" and "low" or "polite" and "impolite" literary culture that were emerging during the early decades of the eighteenth century.

Opening with a squabble, Gay begins on a deliberately discordant note which sets the scene for further skirmishes; but the quarrel begins even before the poem's opening lines. In the mock-archaic "Proeme" to *The Shepherd's Week*, Gay appears to side with Philips, declaring that he will describe the countryside as it really appears. He assures readers that his shepherdesses will not be found "idly piping on oaten Reeds," but engaged in rural labor – milking cows and driving the hogs to their sties. His shepherds will sleep under hedges rather than beneath myrtle. ("The Proeme to The Courteous Reader," in Gay 1974: i. 90–2). He goes on to distinguish his own realistic and "home-bred" eclogues from the productions of a group of "certain young Men of insipid Delicacy" who preferred to "confine Pastoral" to a "Golden Age." These

young men were Gay's Tory allies, Pope and Swift, who had recently formed the Scriblerus Club. Other members included Parnell, Prior, Arbuthnot, Harley, Bishop Atterbury, and Gay himself, who was secretary to the club when *The Shepherd's Week* was finally published, in April 1714. Gay's concern to expose the falseness of Philips's pastoral was animated by Scriblerian determination to ridicule the age's false taste in learning.

Following Pope's example, Gay repeatedly picks up and amplifies features of Philips's pastoral technique in such a way as to render them ridiculous. Appearing to align himself with Philips's realistic mode, Gay's poem both parodies and exposes the limitations of Philips's claims to rural authenticity. Gay goes even further than Philips in representing an "authentic" picture of rural life: he does not sentimentalize his rural folk, but gives them *corns, blisters, blubber'd lips* worn with *smutty pipes*, and *stained teeth*.

Like Philips, Gay draws on conventional pastoral motifs: the singing contest, a forsaken girl bemoaning her unhappy fate, two swains lamenting the death of the maid they both loved. But throughout the poem his homely treatment of commonplaces brings the artificiality of some modern versions of these classical conventions into sharp focus. In the second eclogue, "Tuesday," Marian speaks of her unrequited love for Colin Clout with an unsentimental bluntness:

> To warm thy Broth I burnt my Hands for Haste.
> When hungry thou stood'st *staring, like an Oaf*,
> I slic'd the Luncheon from the Barly Loaf,
> With crumbled Bread I thicken'd well thy Mess.
> Ah, love me more, or love thy Pottage less!
> (ll. 68–72)

Gay draws attention to Marian's clumsiness – both verbal and physical (she burnt her hands "for Haste"). But his perspective combines gentle mockery with tenderness. Marian soon forgets her troubles, and turns, once again, to practical matters, when Goody Dobbins bring her cow to bull:

> With Apron blue to dry her Tears she sought,
> Then saw the Cow well serv'd, and took a Groat.
> (ll. 105–6)

Although Marian is forsaken, at least the cow has been well served.

Bathos is a keynote throughout the poem, and Gay regularly undermines pathos and punctures sentiment. The singing contest in "Monday" ends bluntly in a draw, with Cloddipole declaring that he and the herds are "weary" (l. 124) of the shepherd's singing. In "Wednesday," a "pensive and forlorn" Sparabella bemoans the loss of her sweetheart, Bumkinet, to her rival Clumsilis. As night falls she resolves to take her own life; but although the scene is a set piece of melancholy, with the onset of weeping

dew and the hoarse Owl singing "woeful Dirges," the "prudent Maiden" misses her cue: deeming it "too late" to take any further action, she "defers her Fate" until the morning (ll. 115–20). In "Thursday" another forlorn maid, Hobnelia, complains that her "true-love," Lubberkin, has left her for a town maiden. She casts spells to bring back her stray lover, but at the end of the eclogue, when Lubberkin unexpectedly reappears to claim Hobnelia as his own, rather than falling into his arms she collapses to the ground in shock, undercutting any possibility of a sentimental finale. The final words of the eclogue underline the comic bathos: "adown, adown, adown!" (l. 136). "Friday" finds two swains, Grubbinol and Bumkinet, weeping over Blouzelinda's suicide. But their sorrows are soon forgotten when "bonny Susan," a "willing Maid" appears (ll. 160–2); they follow her to the alehouse where they forget their cares. Finally, "Saturday; or, the Flights," opens with a lofty invocation to the "rustick Muse" to prepare "sublimer strains" and to "raise" "thy homely voice to loftier Numbers" (ll. 1–3), but the poem soon sinks to the homely and uncouth. Susan drops behind the hedge to relieve herself, but is surprised to find a sleeping Bowzybeus lying underneath her. The "snoring Lout" Bowzybeus is woken by her screams, and begins to sing to an assembling crowd:

> Of *Raree-Shows* he sung, and *Punch*'s Feats,
> Of Pockets pick'd in Crowds, and various Cheats.
> Then sad he sung *the Children in the Wood*.
> Ah barb'rous Uncle, stain'd with Infant Blood!
> (ll. 89–92)

> He sung of *Taffey Welch*, and *Sawney Scot*,
> *Lilly-bullero* and the *Irish Trot*.
> Why should I tell of *Bateman* or of *Shore*,
> Or *Wantley's Dragon* slain by valiant *Moore*,
> *The Bow'r of Rosamond*, or *Robin Hood*,
> And how the *Grass now grows where* Troy Town *stood*?
> (ll. 115–20)

In his "Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition" the eighteenth-century Scottish poet and critic James Beattie noted the comic heterogeneity of Bowzybeus's song, explaining that "Laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage" (Beattie 1776: 347). With their indecorous mingling of Irish and Welsh, jaunty dances rubbing up against tragic tales, and ballads jostling against Trojan epic, these lines display the ludicrous incongruity which appealed to Beattie. This comic caroling ends as abruptly as it began when Bowzybeus drops down onto a wheatsheaf and falls asleep: "The Pow'r that Guards the Drunk, his Sleep attends, / 'Till, ruddy, like his Face, the Sun descends" (ll. 127–8). The simile's comic bathos (comparing the sun to a ruddy face) is emphasized by the unexpected verb "descends," which takes the place of the more conventional "setting" – and it is especially apt that a poem that delights in sinking should end on the word "descends."

Like many poets of the period 1700–50, Gay is fascinated by the tensions between "high" and "low," the polite and the indecorous. In *The Shepherd's Week*, frequent and nimble shifts of tone and perspective often make it hard to know from which point of view his narrator is speaking. As with Swift, his friend and fellow Scriblerian, it can be difficult to discern whether Gay is mocking or in earnest. Swift's presence can be felt behind these lines from the very first book of *The Shepherd's Week*:

> From *Cloddipole* we learnt to read the Skies,
> To know when Hail will fall, or Winds arise.
> He taught us erst the Heifers Tail to view,
> When stuck aloft, that Show'rs would strait ensue;
> He first that useful Secret did explain,
> That pricking Corns foretold the gath'ring Rain.
> (ll. 23–8)

Gay's scatology would have delighted Swift. The "Show'rs" which "ensue" might issue from the cow (lifting its tail to urinate) as well as from the clouds, and what appears to be an authentic (and authentically ribald) example of rural folk wisdom couches a witty allusion to a very urban scene. Gay's portentous "Corns" and heifer's "Tail" are not taken from the pages of a country almanac, but lifted out of Swift's "A Description of a City Shower," a town eclogue published in *The Tatler*, no. 238, on Tuesday, October 17, 1710:

> Careful Observers may foretel the Hour,
> (By sure Prognosticks) when to dread a Shower:
> While Rain depends, the pensive Cat gives o'er
> Her Frolicks, and pursues her Tail no more.
> Returning Home at Night, you'll find the Sink
> Strike your offended Sense with double Stink;
> If you be wise, then go not far to dine,
> You'll spend in Coach-Hire more than save in Wine.
> A coming Shower your shooting Corns presage,
> Old Aches throb, your hollow Tooth will rage.
> (ll. 1–10)

In these lines, Swift sets up a comic disjunction between the lofty and ominously serious tone suggested by words such as "foretel," "dread," and "pensive" and the grotesque and visceral catalogue which ensues – the stink, the shooting Corns, aching limbs, and throbbing tooth, all signs of the coming storm. These vulgar portents, however, were at home not only in popular folk-lore and almanacs, but also in high literature: versions of the ancient "Prognosticks" of changing weather offered in the first book of Virgil's *Georgics* (i. 351–92).

Swift, like Gay, delights in staging such playful incongruities, mock-heroically attaching the word "rage," usually associated with wars and battles, to a toothache.

Cast in heroic couplets, and drawing on the language of epic, the poem is formally and linguistically at odds with its vulgar subject. When it was first published in *The Tatler*, Steele drew attention to these mock-heroic tensions in his introduction, citing the epic precedents of the tempest in *Aeneid*, Book 1, and the flood in *Aeneid*, Book 4. Swift's poem concludes in a mighty deluge that has its source in Genesis as well as in Virgil: the great Fleet Ditch has swollen and overflows through the filthy streets of eighteenth-century London, carrying all manner of detritus:

> Sweepings from Butchers Stalls, Dung, Guts and Blood,
> Drown'd Puppies, stinking Sprats, all drench'd in Mud,
> Dead Cats and Turnep-Tops come tumbling down the Flood.
> (ll. 61–3)

The final couplet swells into a triplet rhyme, and the last line is distended with two extra syllables into an alexandrine, forced to expand its bounds by the tide of refuse carried in its wake.

Throughout *The Shepherd's Week*, Gay, like Swift, sets up tensions between the polite and the vulgar. Sometimes the effect is mock-heroic, but the most insistent comic disjunctions are achieved by bringing the codes and conventions of pastoral, rather than epic, to bear on grotesque subjects. In this, Gay's eclogues can be compared fruitfully with another of Swift's urban pastorals. "A Description of the Morning," a companion piece to "A Description of a City Shower," appeared in *The Tatler*, no. 9, on April 30, 1709. By coincidence it was published in the same week as the sixth volume of Tonson's *Miscellanies* containing Pope's and Philips's pastorals, and, like *The Shepherd's Week*, it contributed to a larger conversation about pastoral conventions taking place in London coffee-houses and on the pages of polite journals in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Introducing the poem, Steele explains how "Mr Humphrey Wagstaff" (Swift's pseudonym) has "described Things exactly as they happen: He never forms Fields, or Nymphs, or Groves where they are not, but makes the Incidents just as they really appear." Repeatedly, pastoral expectations are set up, and then dashed. The conventional "rosy dawn" is rendered "ruddy," and heralded by a hackney coach rather than by Phoebus' chariot. In place of Aurora rising from Tithonus' bed, we have Betty creeping out of her master's bed and stealing home to discompose her own. Instead of rural swains, Swift's urban pastoral is filled with town workers and sleepy schoolboys; a prison turnkey prepares to round up a flock of thieves into prison; shrill notes, screaming, and street cries, rather than birdsong, break the silence; and the landscape is sprinkled not with dew but with dirt. But there remains something engaging in the homely and gross details of Swift's burlesque, because they gesture at an intimacy which was firmly off-limits in the conventional neoclassical pastoral.

Like Swift and his fellow wits, Gay delights in comic collisions between "high" and "low," the "polite" and the "vulgar." In *The Shepherd's Week*, the mock-learned footnotes provide an early example of what was to become a conventional Scriblerian

ploy in *The Dunciad*. In "Monday," Lobbin Clout describes his sweetheart's taste for the humble turnip:

> *Leek* to the *Welch*, to *Dutchmen Butter*'s dear,
> Of *Irish* Swains *Potatoe* is the Chear;
> *Oats* for their Feasts the *Scottish* Shepherds grind,
> Sweet *Turnips* are the food of *Blouzelind*.
> While she loves *Turnips*, *Butter* I'll despise,
> Nor *Leeks* nor *Oatmeal* nor *Potatoe* prize.
> (ll. 83–8)

Gay's mock-scholarly note to these lines reveals their classical source to be a passage from Virgil's seventh eclogue, in which Corydon describes his beloved Phyllis's fondness for hazel trees:

> CORYDON: Dearest is the poplar to Alcides, the vine to Bacchus, the myrtle to lovely Venus, and his own laurel to Phoebus. Phyllis loves hazels, and while Phyllis loves them, neither myrtle nor laurel of Phoebus shall outlive the hazels. (Virgil, *Eclogues*, 73).

There is a comic disjunction here between the homeliness of Corydon's diction and the elevated tenor of Gay's classical source. Gay's Welch, Dutchmen, Irish Swains, and Scottish Shepherds are the humble equivalents of Virgil's divine roll call – Alcides (Hercules' father), Bacchus, Venus, and Phoebus; instead of poetical trees, Gay gives us homely fare – leeks, butter, potatoes, and oats. Where Virgil sinks from laurel and vine and myrtle to the unpoetical hazel tree, Gay descends even lower, to the turnip.

Gay sinks lower still in his note to the following lines from Monday:

> As my *Buxoma* in a Morning fair,
> With gentle Finger stroak'd her milky Care
> I queintly stole a kiss . . .
> (ll. 77–9)

The footnote introduces vulgarity in the semblance of polite scholarship:

> 'Queint' *has various Significations in the ancient* English *Authors. I have used it in this Place in the same Sense as* Chaucer *hath done in his* Miller's Tale. As clerkes been full subtil and queint, (*by which he means* Arch *or* Waggish) *and not in that obscene Sense wherein he useth it in the Line immediately following.*

Gay corrupts what might have remained innocent by gesturing at the "obscene Sense" of "queint." This scholarly undercurrent draws out the poem's latent innuendo, where the proximity of the words "milky" and "Finger" draws the visceral noun "queint" out of the innocent adjective "queintly." Readers have to be learned as well as knowing

to get the joke. Hinting at this lewd Chaucerian sense is at once a sophisticated and a smutty joke, and, coupling carnal and scholarly knowledge, Gay gestures at the biblical narrative of lost innocence. Shame is the burden of a fallen world – it is not until they have eaten from the fruit of the forbidden tree that Adam and Eve feel embarrassed at their nakedness. Gay's poem returns to an age-old problem: Can pastoral innocence be described from a fallen, sophisticated perspective?

The Shepherd's Week is crammed with *double entendres* and takes on, according to Brean Hammond, a "seaside postcard jocularity." This sauciness is in marked contrast to Philips's urban sentimentalism. For all its wit and deft irony, Gay's poem is more robust and sincere in its descriptions of country life than Philips's pastorals. Pope had complained in his "Discourse on Pastoral" and, more covertly, in *The Guardian* no. 40, that the awkward use of archaism and the display of learning in Philips's pastorals and Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* interfered with their attempted pastoral ease and simplicity. According to Tickell, however, Philips had hit upon "*Sincerity and Truth*" and depicted "Pastoral life . . . where Nature is not much depraved," and had captured rural "Innocence." But the passages he chose to illustrate these claims, in *The Guardian*, no. 23, suggested otherwise:

> Once Delia slept, on easie Moss reclin'd,
> Her lovely Limbs half bare, and rude the Wind:
> I smooth'd her Coats, and stole a silent Kiss;
> Condemn me, Shepherds, if I did amiss.

Tickell explained that this coy erotic hinting presented a "slight transgression" from pastoral purity, which highlighted the prevailing innocence of the whole. But Philips's lines call the innocent simplicity of country shepherds into question. The "rude wind" suggests the corresponding rudeness of the swain. The apparently gallant gesture of smoothing Delia's coats and covering her modesty enables this lewd swain to touch Delia, so that what appears to be a gesture of modesty actually hides a surreptitious grope.

Like Pope, Gay targeted particular passages in Philips's poem that had been singled out for praise by Tickell. He parodied Philips's voyeurism in these lines in "Monday," where Lobbin boasts:

> As *Blouzelinda* in a gamesome Mood,
> Behind a Haycock loudly laughing stood,
> I slily ran, and snatch'd a hasty Kiss,
> She wip'd her Lips, nor took it much amiss.
> (ll. 71–4)

The rhyme of "Kiss" and "amiss" echoes Philips's original chime ("silent Kiss / . . . did amiss"), but what was coy in Philips becomes honest and hearty in Gay: Philips's slumbering lass becomes Gay's "gamesome" wench.

Later, in "Monday," Gay returns to the same passage from Philips's pastorals, and once again he exposes and amplifies its latent innuendo:

> On two near Elms, the slacken'd Cord I hung,
> Now high, now low my Blouzelinda swung.
> With the rude Wind her rumpled garment rose,
> And show'd her taper Leg, and scarlet Hose.
> (ll. 103–6)

Much more is revealed in Gay's lines than by Philips's coy suggestions. The "rude Wind" issues from Philips's poem, but in Gay's lines the phrase takes on a more vulgar suggestion; the hidden *rump* in "rumpled" suggests the source of a cruder wind. This eruption of flatulence is a typical Scriblerian ploy – we find it in Swift and Pope, when they are lampooning enemies, and here it is a sign of Gay's humorous parodic intention.

Straight after this windy flourish, Cuddy, ever keen to surpass his rival Lobbin, boasts:

> Across the fallen Oak the Plank I laid,
> And my self pois'd against the tott'ring Maid,
> High leapt the Plank; adown Buxoma fell;
> I spy'd – but faithful Sweethearts never tell.
> (ll. 107–10)

This bawdy coyness leaves little to the imagination. The word "fell" has acquired force as a rhyme word, and it acquires further emphasis through repetition, echoing the earlier use of "fallen." The lifting plank serves as a comic allegory for Cuddy's rising member, and the fall of this "tott'ring Maid" implies her undoing. The word "laid," with its sexual sense, suggests a further innuendo, ironically at odds with its rhyme word, "Maid."

The occasion for *The Shepherd's Week* may have been satirical, but its roots are in ancient pastoral. In the "Proeme," Gay praises the Greek poet Theocritus and claims to be his true English heir, and although much of the "Proeme" is spoken in jest, there is some truth in this assertion. Theocritus inaugurated the pastoral poem in the third century BCE, and his *Idylls* were written in a rough Doric dialect. Virgil developed the form after the Theocritan pattern, but his Latin *Eclogues* did not contain dialect and were more refined and polished than the Greek original. Unlike Virgil's smooth-talking shepherds, Theocritus did not shy away from country matters or evade the cruder aspects of rural life: his swains, as Gay points out, use "foul Language, and behold their Goats at Rut in all their Simplicity." Theocritan eclogues did not labor under the same polite constraints as eighteenth-century pastoral, and they provided Gay with license and authority for writing his own eclogues in a rougher manner.

By the end of the eighteenth century pastoral had shifted ground, and *The Shepherd's Week* was no longer received as a comic burlesque; the rudeness that had been perceived as an index of scurrilous satire by the poem's first audience was taken as a sign of authenticity by later readers. Oliver Goldsmith claimed that Gay "more resembles Theocritus than any other English pastoral writer whatsoever" (Goldsmith 1767: vol. 1, 133), and in 1815 Wordsworth explained that although Pope and his admirers could perceive in Gay's poem "nothing but what was ridiculous," later readers found it a charming example of rustic authenticity:

> though these Poems contain some detestable passages, the effect, as Dr. Johnson well observes, "of reality and truth became conspicuous even when the intention was to show them grovelling and degraded." The Pastorals, ludicrous to such as prided themselves upon their refinement, in spite of those disgusting passages, "became popular, and were read with delight, as just representations of rural manners and occupations." (Wordsworth 1974: vol. 3, l. 72)

The changing reception of *The Shepherd's Week* marks a shift in pastoral conventions, but it is ironic that a poem that doggedly questions the possibility of an authentic representation of pastoral innocence should itself have become a model of rural authenticity.

See also chs. 15, "Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, and Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*"; 26, "Epic and Mock-Heroic"; 27, "Verse Satire"; 40, "Rural Poetry and the Self-Taught Tradition."

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11

Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* and "Eloisa to Abelard"

Valerie Rumbold

These two early poems appeared in the 1717 folio *Works* in which, still aged only twenty-nine, Pope demonstrated to the literary world the impressive range and accomplishment of his career to date. "Eloisa" was presented there for the first time, while versions of the *Rape* had already appeared in 1712 and 1714. The two poems served to show not only the quality but also the variety of which Pope was capable. While "Eloisa" draws on the tragic and elegiac rhetoric of the heroic letter (dramatic epistles of female lamentation influenced by the *Heroides* of the Roman poet Ovid), the *Rape* is Pope's decisive intervention in the developing tradition of mock-epic (comic satires using the motifs of ancient epic to reflect ironically on modern life).

There are also important similarities between the two poems. Both, as already mentioned, build on models from the ancient world; both are composed in heroic couplets; both base their narratives on real-life events; and both take women as protagonists. More troublingly, both hinge on an infringement of bodily integrity that leads to division both between and within individuals (Abelard is castrated, Belinda has her hair cut against her will); both imagine a state of wholeness that contrasts with the disaster that has actually occurred; and both end with a transposition of the poem's concerns into a version of poetry's traditional claims to immortalize its subject.

Both narratives, moreover, are handled in such a way as to engage with difficult issues in the poet's own life. Both end with a carefully staged focus on Pope's claims for the transcendent significance of his art. Spinal tuberculosis had limited his growth, distorted his figure, and cramped his heart and lungs, making many forms of "manly" exertion impossible; yet still in the conclusions of these poems the poet speaks as a figure of potency. Moreover, in choosing these particular female subjects he appropriates the expressive terrain of confinement and impotence imposed upon them by gender, imprisonment, and violence (Rumbold 1989: 4–6). Though attracted to women, Pope was defensive about their possible reaction to his physique and regarded himself as effectively barred from marriage; but in the poems he takes on a creator's authority over women who are exemplars of beauty and passion, while

(at least in one possible view of the poems) presiding over the suppression of his heroines' desires.

Difficult issues of religious and political identity are also evoked in both poems. As a Catholic at a time when Catholicism was officially regarded as political and cultural subversion, and as the son of a convert from the middle ranks of society, Pope could not identify unproblematically either with the Protestant establishment or with the old Catholic gentry who made up much of his early social circle. Both poems signal, though in less than straightforward ways, the awkwardness of his specific religious identity, "Eloisa" by imagining a version of medieval monasticism, and the *Rape* by taking as its subject a quarrel in Catholic high society. In terms of party politics, the events surrounding the death of Queen Anne in 1714, leading to the establishment under George I of a Whig hegemony that would last the rest of Pope's life, told against the basically Tory poet's earlier hope of situating himself above narrow considerations of party; and in the light of this dilemma, both poems can be read in terms of political position-taking. "Eloisa" gives an account of the old religion in marked contrast with the propaganda of patriotic Whiggery, and its heroine's high-minded defiance of common sense constraints recalls the aristocratic ethos of heroic love that had animated the world-defying passions of the Restoration tragedy as conceived by triumphant royalists. The *Rape*, on the other hand, can be read in terms of subversive allusion to the triumph of the Hanoverian Georges and the exile of the Stuarts (Erskine-Hill 1996: 71–93). Both poems, from many points of view, allow for a constant play between their ostensible subjects and what might be at stake for the poet in taking on those subjects.

A productive first approach to these poems might well begin by noting a shared characteristic that links their themes to their formal strategies. (In fact, it is a tendency shared by Pope's work more widely, and by the wider culture in which his poetry was conceived.) Because it lends itself to patterns of comparison and contrast, the rhyming couplet is a potent expressive medium for themes of conflict between ideals or entities defined by their difference one from another. The "Advertisement" to "Eloisa," for example, invites the reader to attend to "the struggles of grace and nature, virtue and passion" (Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 133). In the climactic battle between men and women in *The Rape of the Lock*, scales appear in the air to weigh up the opposed forces:

> Now *Jove* suspends his golden scales in air,
> Weighs the Men's wits against the Lady's hair;
> The doubtful beam long nods from side to side;
> At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside.
> (*The Rape of the Lock*, v. 71–4)

The characteristic polarizing dynamic of the two poems starts at the level of line and couplet. It then builds into larger formal and thematic structures, connecting with wider trends in a period particularly prone to argue in terms such as Court and

Country, Whig and Tory, or ancient and modern. Yet the texts do not rest content with the relentless to and fro of such arguments, but also question the adequacy of such binary oppositions.

At first sight, "Eloisa" is full of expressive oppositions between the pull of the body and its associated drives and the spiritual claims of the Christian religion, intensified in the context of this poem by the particular form of imagined medieval monasticism to which the protagonist has submitted. (Any simple equation of the poem's religious assumptions with either medieval practice or Pope's own Catholicism is problematic: his source, a translation indirectly derived from the medieval originals via a seventeenth-century French reworking, had given the subject an almost impenetrable gloss of romance and sensationalism; and the convents he would have known most about, the English communities on the continent where friends like the Blount sisters had been educated, were not isolated settlements of contemplatives like the one hinted at in the poem, but lively urban communities orientated to the education of the young, whose members had active family networks that kept them in constant connection with English Catholic society [Rumbold 1989: 58–9].) A typical passage of conflict between sexual love and religious discipline concludes the poem's opening exposition:

> Heav'n claims me all in vain, while he has part,
> Still rebel nature holds out half my heart;
> Nor pray'rs nor fasts its stubborn pulse restrain,
> Nor tears, for ages, taught to flow in vain.
> ("Eloisa to Abelard," ll. 25–8)

The first line of each of these couplets swivels around an opposition between God/spirit/grace and Abelard/body/nature: the totality of God's demands is contrasted with Eloisa's reservations in favor of her lover; religious exercises are set against the insistent rhythms of the body. The second line in each case is subtler in its contribution to the pattern: the heart is divided, but we hear only of the rebel part; and the tears that should express penitence prove futile. It is not hard to find lines that stage the polarization that Pope sees in his source and encourages us in his "Advertisement" to look for in the poem; but when we analyze them in the context of the passages of which they form part, the pattern is not as mechanical as an unpracticed reader might fear. In a world ostensibly divided between opposites, we are challenged by what cannot be accommodated, what runs against the grain.

David Morris intriguingly comments that though Pope routinely condemned medieval scholastic philosophy as sterile and divisive, he "does not exploit the irony that Abelard, as the founder of scholastic philosophy, bears responsibility for the false philosophical antagonism between reason and passion that is a main source of Eloisa's dilemma" (Morris 1984: 141); and a major tradition in readings of the poem has been to discern progress, or lack of it, in Eloisa's attempts to achieve a resolution of a conflict inseparable from the either/or choices she sees before her (DePorte 1990:

n. 8). While the first of these binaries, "grace and nature," evokes the Christian insistence that fallen human nature must submit to redemptive grace or risk damnation, the second, "virtue and passion," is more problematically entwined with gendered expectations: virtue, generally equated in women with virginity before marriage and chastity thereafter, is too easily contrasted with a passion culturally associated with the sensuality traditionally attributed to women and cited as justification for their subjection to patriarchal control. It is hard, for example, to think that either Pope or his readers would have focused so readily on the tutor Abelard's combat between virtue and passion, as he prepared to set the story in motion by seducing his pupil Eloisa. In the poem, even the possibility of such an angle on its rights and wrongs tends to be obscured by the sheer verve of moral idealism with which Eloisa insists on the purity of her passion, in contrast to the allegedly instrumental conformity of "the wedded dame":

> Let wealth, let honour, wait the wedded dame,
> August her deed, and sacred be her fame;
> Before true passion all those views remove,
> Fame, wealth, and honour! what are you to Love?
> (ll. 77–80)

This leaves the married woman looking distinctly meretricious, reliant for her "august" and "sacred" status on Eloisa's generous concession, while Eloisa herself, with a bravura reminiscent of the "heroic love" of Restoration aristocratic self-idealization, advocates a radical disinterest in material and social rewards that defies the most basic requirements of female virtue in the eighteenth century. It is no accident that it is this insistence on sidelining conventional morality that leads into the clearest articulation of a possibility of transcending the oppositions on which the poem seems to be posited:

> Oh happy state! when souls each other draw,
> When love is liberty, and nature, law:
> All then is full, possessing, and possest,
> No craving Void left aking in the breast:
> Ev'n thought meets thought e'er from the lips it part,
> And each warm wish springs mutual from the heart.
> This sure is bliss (if bliss on earth there be)
> And once the lot of *Abelard* and me.
> (ll. 91–8)

Not only are the two lovers united on every imaginable level (in contrast to their present separation), but the opposition between "liberty" and "law" is dissolved, as one is identified with "love" and the other with "nature" – both terms that belong, in this context, at the bodily pole of the poem's undergirding binary, although the ambiguity of "love" in the context of Eloisa's religious profession is one that will also

be explored in visions of divine love elsewhere in the poem. The passage also eliminates any hierarchy between lovers in a vision of absolute and spontaneous mutuality, "possessing, and possest," and, crucially, celebrates the absence of the "craving Void left aking in the breast." It is almost as if Eloisa regains in her relationship with Abelard that originary psychological state in which the infant perceives no boundary between self and mother. From this point of view, the "Void" might be read as that sense of need and desire inseparable from adult knowledge of oneself as an individual, interpreted, in this poem and in the broader construction of experience of which its binary rhetoric partakes, by the splitting of the world into opposed pairings of which one must choose one and cannot have both. Not only lines and couplets, but the poem as a whole switchbacks around this necessity, sharpened (and this is a key factor in the aptness of the story to Pope's project) by the special violence and finality of the castration that brings this particular sexual relationship to an end: these are not simply separated or estranged lovers, but lovers whose complication of physical impairment and voluntary religious renunciation carry separation and estrangement to the extreme. Their peculiar situation matters not because of its freakish aspect, but because it exposes in an intense way the consequences of understanding the world through this particular kind of rhetorical construction, enabling the poem to explore, as it swings between spiritual aspiration and bodily desire, a heightened version of an exemplary conflict.

It is instructive to consider, not only thematically, but also from the point of view of Pope's craft as poet, Eloisa's evocation of the happiness of "the blameless Vestal," a figure entirely at ease with her sublimation of sexual desire in anticipation of union with the heavenly bridegroom ("For her the Spouse prepares the bridal ring, / For her white virgins *Hymenæals* sing": ll. 217–18). In Eloisa's fantasy of an ideal vocation, phrases and lines balance less to register tension than to assure fullness and completion. (Even Eloisa's evocation of her former happiness with Abelard, as already quoted, offers a pointed contrast in its precise registration of the tensions uniquely resolved in their love.) Here, there is a loss of energy that powerfully suggests the dynamic function of the conflicts that characteristically keep the verse shifting between incompatible options:

> How happy is the blameless Vestal's lot?
> The world forgetting, by the world forgot.
> Eternal sun-shine of the spotless mind!
> Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd;
> Labour and rest, that equal periods keep;
> "Obedient slumbers that can wake and weep";
> Desires compos'd, affections ever even,
> Tears that delight, and sighs that waft to heav'n.
> (ll. 207–14)

The previous restless movement does, however, return to the poem as Eloisa imagines Abelard discharging the role of priest at her deathbed. Even here there is

division between ostensible piety and erotic preoccupation, as he is imagined holding "the Cross before my lifted eye" (l. 329). The cross evidently cannot speak to her of Christ's redeeming death nearly as vividly as proximity to Abelard speaks of the body and its desires, even at the moment of escaping them for ever: "It will be then no crime to gaze on me. / See from my cheek the transient roses fly! / See the last sparkle languish in my eye!" (ll. 332–4). And Eloisa still has one earthly desire that reaches beyond her death: "May one kind grave unite each hapless name, / And graft my love immortal on thy fame" (ll. 345–6). Even if she is to be imagined as finally transcending life's binary torments, safe "Where flames refin'd in breasts seraphic glow" (l. 322) (a formulation in which she once more attempts to conceive a fullness of life capable of reconciling grace and nature, virtue and passion), her earthly remains, however mixed with Abelard's, still invite commemoration within a gendered system of "fame" and "love."

The disruptive power of sexual attraction is also central to *The Rape of the Lock*. Lord Petre had caused outrage by snipping a lock of Arabella Fermor's hair, and by 1717 Pope had added considerably to the two-canto poem of 1712 that had been his first response to the story. In 1714 he added the divine "machinery" of sylphs and gnomes, supplying a key desideratum of the epic mode; and in 1717 he further added a speech for Clarissa (v. 9–34), an account of women's role that parodies the pre-battle exposition of warriors' duties and privileges voiced by Homer's Sarpedon (Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 129). The self-conscious playfulness of these epic elaborations contrasts sharply with the investment in high heroic emotionalism that marks "Eloisa," with its inheritance from Ovidian and later traditions of epistolary lament. Yet like the contrasts available within the couplet form itself, the contrast of genre offers Pope a method of juxtaposing radically different angles on surprisingly similar issues; for like "Eloisa," the *Rape* too hinges on an estranging trespass on bodily integrity. This time it is not a man's genitals but a woman's hair that is severed (though the ritual significance of cut locks might warn against too easy laughter – witness the biblical Samson, who lost his strength when Delilah had his "seven locks" shaved [Judges 16: 4–21], or Virgil's suicide Dido, whose soul could not leave her body until a lock had been cut as a sacrifice to the gods of the underworld [Erskine-Hill 1996: 90–1]). Like Abelard's castration, the theft of Belinda's lock effects a violent division not only between man and woman but also within the woman herself. In the poem, the perpetrator (the Baron, based on Lord Petre) arouses in his victim (Belinda, based on Arabella Fermor) such a rage that battle ensues: in real life, it seems that the quarrel caused a rift between their families that ended any prospect of marriage (Rumbold 1989: 67–9).

The Rape of the Lock evokes a whole range of binaries against which its mock-heroic conflict is to be played out:

> What dire Offence from am'rous causes springs,
> What mighty contests rise from trivial things,
> I sing – This verse to C—, Muse! is due:

This, ev'n *Belinda* may vouchsafe to view:
Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,
If She inspire, and He approve my lays.
Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel
A well-bred Lord t'assault a gentle *Belle*?
Oh say what stranger cause, yet unexplor'd,
Cou'd make a gentle *Belle* reject a Lord?
And dwells such rage in softest bosoms then?
And lodge such daring souls in Little men?
(i. 1–12)

A contrast is set up in the second line between "mighty contests" and the "trivial things" that allegedly give rise to them; and the disposition of the two noun phrases at each end of the first and second lines implies that, since "dire Offence" provides an obvious parallel to the former, "am'rous causes" must be paralleled with the latter. Yet this is not in itself quite so obvious: Eloisa, for instance, had no reason to think that "am'rous causes" were "trivial"; and even if we rule out her evidence as being from a contrasted and therefore inadmissible genre, the very fact that we need to make this concession reminds us that Eloisa and Belinda are constructions dependent each on her respective generic matrix: there is no imaginable world in which they can both be equally plausible. At the beginning of *The Rape of the Lock* readers are being asked not so much to test the equivalence of the "am'rous" and the "trivial" against real-world experience as to recognize and accept the belittling wit expected of a polite (if still slightly rakish) satire on relations between the sexes.

This wit in effect minimizes the trespass that has provoked Belinda's anger, and we may accordingly suspect a routine assumption of masculine authority that would underwrite such a judgment. If we follow the parallel logic of the third couplet, for instance, Belinda is balanced against Caryll. (Identified merely as "C—," he was the young Pope's older and socially more distinguished friend, and Lord Petre's guardian; and it was he who had asked Pope to write something humorous about the quarrel in the hope of reconciling the parties.) The beginning of each line is Belinda's: she provides the "subject," "slight" as it is said to be; and she is the poet's inspiration. The end of each line, however, belongs to Caryll, who it is hoped will "approve" and "praise" the poem he has in effect commissioned: what closes the couplet and is endorsed by its rhyme is the masculine aspiration to art, created by the poet and confirmed by the patron's judgment. It seems an easy step to the next paragraph of the passage, where parallel questions are framed by minimally contrasted couplets whose modulation from "strange" to "stranger" insinuates that a woman's refusal of a man is more surprising than a man's resort to violence against her. Again, the victim is labeled as the more perverse: if he is (understandably?) drawn by the beauty and style of "a gentle *Belle*," she is (mystifyingly?) unresponsive to the wealth and status of "a Lord." Even when acting against gendered expectation in this way, Belinda furnishes an opportunity for the rehearsal of her sex's allegedly instrumental view of marriage, its fixation on wealth and rank.

To read in this way is to read against the masculine grain of the presentation, interpreting the balancing and pairing of terms as part of a systematic strategy of blaming the victim. However, much in the poem will seek to counter so crude (if subtly insinuated) an argument; and this introductory passage closes with a pair of questions that puts another factor into the balance. Although "such rage" compromises a member of the sex whose "softest bosoms" suggest a contrasting ideal of sweet responsiveness, what is much more striking is the surprisingly satirical force of the final phrase of the passage: that "Little men" should have "such daring souls" as to attack a woman whose anger will increasingly be elevated, within the mock-heroic myth of the poem, into heroic rage. The Baron will sacrifice on the altar of love a collection of "trophies of his former loves" that is both light-minded and indecorous: his "twelve vast French Romances, neatly gilt" are accompanied not only by "half a pair of gloves," but also by "three garters" (ii. 38–40). Sir Plume, whose wife Thalestris commands a disastrously vigorous rhetoric, is himself unable to frame a coherent sentence; and it would be hard for a female character to be any more identified with her material appurtenances than this would-be defender of female vulnerability. He is introduced as "of amber Snuff-box justly vain, / And the nice conduct of a clouded Cane" (iv. 123–4), and his mute accoutrements make more impact than he does:

> "Plague on't! 'tis past a jest – nay prithee, pox!
> "Give her the hair – he spoke, and rapp'd his box.
> (iv. 129–30)

The final question mark to be placed against the claims of masculine intellect comes with the apparition of the cosmic scales to decide the battle. While this is at one level a witty allusion to a familiar epic motif (Fairer and Gerrard 1999: 131), what is being weighed here is not simply the fortunes of the contending parties, but the kind of resource that each brings to the struggle, conceived on each side as constitutive of one of the two warring sexes. Men are aligned with intellect, women with the body and sexuality, a reading of gender entirely in line with the dominant outlook of the poem so far, and with wide resonance in the culture of the time; yet when the scales come to rest, the result is not an obvious victory for the male sex:

> The doubtful beam long nods from side to side;
> At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside.
> (v. 73–4)

It is Belinda's lock that weighs heaviest, and the men are routed. Yet even here the ostensible purport of the action is overcast by the inevitability (from the masculine perspective) of women's sexual need of men, as the Baron prepares to expire in a heroic climax of *double entendre*:

> Boast not my fall (he cry'd) insulting foe!
> Thou by some other shalt be laid as low.

Nor think, to die dejects my lofty mind:
All that I dread is leaving you behind!
Rather than so, ah let me still survive,
And burn in *Cupid*'s flames, – but burn alive.
(v. 97–102)

Still Belinda challenges him to "Restore the Lock!," and still the text withholds approval of his original trespass, reminding us that the lock had been "obtain'd with guilt" as well as "kept with pain" (v. 103, 109). It might seem that Belinda has at last won her case, although the Baron's innuendo (echoing the narrator's: cf. v. 77–80) keeps in view an irrepressible masculine confidence that the Baron shares – at least on occasion – with the poem's narrator, as evidenced by the way that so many of the poem's binaries work to enforce the superiority of male over female.

Where, though, in this poem is there a vision of fullness and integrity to compare with Eloisa's? Is there any evocation of a coherence antecedent to loss and separation, or any sense that it might be restored? Pope testifies that Caryll wanted a poem that would "laugh them together again," so we might perhaps have expected some idealization of the happy marriage and communal reconciliation that might just have been retrievable; but we have none of this, whether in the past or in prospect (Rumbold 1989: 68). Far from matching Eloisa's vision of wholeness in love, Belinda's mental state before the theft of the lock is both dissipated and sexually fixated: exhorted in her dream to "Beware of all, but most beware of man!" (i. 114), she forgets the warning as soon as she sees a love-letter: "'Twas then *Belinda*! if report say true, / Thy eyes first open'd on a Billet-doux" (i. 117–18). The poem insinuates that butterfly-mindedness is characteristic of the society belle. This is made explicit through the mock-epic machinery of sylphs and gnomes, who, as Ariel explains in the dream, ensure that each stimulus is quickly canceled out by the next – and that their charges never concentrate on an individual suitor for long enough to see the man behind the fashionable appurtenances:

With varying vanities, from ev'ry part,
They shift the moving Toyshop of their heart;
Where Wigs with Wigs, with Sword-knots Sword-knots strive,
Beaus banish Beaus, and Coaches Coaches drive.
(i. 99–102)

Under the sylphs' management, the belles' desires flit from one commodity to another; and the beau appears indistinguishable from the wig and sword-knot he wears and the coach in which he rides. This is a world of objects rather than persons, of surfaces rather than interiors; and a consequence is that when Belinda tries to conjure up an alternative life that might have kept her safe, her vision of self-sufficiency and integrity is utterly implausible for the personality the poem has constructed for her. The unremitting modishness of her references and the absence of any but a negative evocation of the benefits of seclusion and simplicity undermine her fantasy even as she utters it:

Oh had I rather un-admir'd remain'd
In some lone isle, or distant Northern land;
Where the gilt Chariot never marks the way,
Where none learn *Ombre*, none e'er taste *Bohea*!
There kept my charms, conceal'd from mortal eye
Like roses that in desarts bloom and die.
What mov'd my mind with youthful Lords to rome?
O had I stay'd, and said my pray'rs at home!
(iv. 153–60)

It is left to Clarissa, who had lent the Baron the scissors in the first place (a neglected rival for his affections, perhaps; or just someone resentful of Belinda's ability to monopolize male attention?) to set forth a realistic alternative for Belinda's next move, and for female life in general. Clarissa (with an infuriatingly patronising "And trust me, dear!") prides herself on telling it like it is: boys will be boys; their estimate of you is what counts in the end; so best smile sweetly and let them get on with it:

But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,
Curl'd or uncurl'd, since Locks will turn to grey,
Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,
And she who scorns a man, must die a maid;
What then remains, but well our pow'r to use,
And keep good humour still whate'er we lose?
And trust me, dear! good humour can prevail,
When airs, and flights, and screams, and scolding fail.
Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll;
Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul.
(v. 25–34)

It is often said that Pope added Clarissa's speech, which appeared for the first time in the 1717 revision of the poem, "to open more clearly the MORAL of the Poem"; but this is in fact an interpretation added by Pope's literary heir William Warburton in his edition of 1751 (Tillotson 1940: 199; Erskine-Hill 1996: 89). Warburton's flatly literal approach is in fact quite at odds with the playful withholding of explicit judgment that is the hallmark of the poem.

This being said, "good nature" does remain, however lamentably to modern readers, the most plausible option that the poem had to offer the women in its original audience. For them, the self-affirmation that many today find inspiring in the mock-heroic posturings the poem allows Belinda would probably have seemed an embarrassing offense against feminine standards of behavior, her representation as modern parody of the hero of ancient epic not a recognition of the obsolescence of traditional paradigms but a snub to overweening self-importance. Pope had, after all, found it advisable to placate Belinda's real-life original with a declaration that "the Character of *Belinda*, as it is now manag'd, resembles You in nothing but in Beauty" (Tillotson 1940: 143). In

comparison with "Eloisa," which became a congenial if in some ways troubling object of imitation and allusion for many eighteenth-century women poets, the *Rape* hardly figures in their work at all: "they evidently found it nearly impossible to adapt *The Rape of the Lock* to a woman's point of view" (Thomas 1994: 132–5, 174–93 at 190). The sense that the epic comparison might dignify as well as criticize a heroine adapted to the realities of modern consumer culture is, in comparison, a rather recent one.

As the two poems come to their conclusions, neither offers a clear prospect of achievable wholeness. Instead, both attempt a displacement of the heroine's dilemma, as the final focus shifts to the poet himself. Eloisa looks forward to becoming the subject of "some future Bard": "The well-sung woes shall sooth my pensive ghost; / He best can paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most" (ll. 367–8). The reference to the poet's own sadness in love compliments Pope's absent friend Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, absent with her husband on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople; but an earlier plan for the ending would apparently have invoked his more loyal if less flamboyant friend Martha Blount (Sherburn 1956: vol. 1, 338) – and what seems most important here is the fact that the poem ultimately comes to rest not on a particular woman, but on the poet. In the final line he appropriates not only the praise of writing well, which we might have expected, but also, more tendentiously, of equaling if not excelling the emotional intensity of his heroine.

The tone of *The Rape of the Lock* is very different; but it too shifts emphasis in its closing lines away from the woman's experience and towards the poet's power. "But trust the Muse," Belinda is exhorted, as the lock disappears into the heavens (v. 123–4). Only the Muse and those blessed with "quick, poetic eyes" can see, as the image of the transfigured star implies, that the quarrel is best pursued no further, that the fuss and anguish will be most constructively interpreted in terms not of crime and disgrace, but rather of testimony to Arabella's beauty (a reading whose strategic support for male rapacity has been frequently noted). The lines insist that the woman's beauty and erotic power is bodily and therefore temporary, while poetry is immortal and immortalizing:

> Then cease, bright nymph! to mourn the ravish'd hair,
> Which adds new glory to the shining sphere!
> Not all the tresses that fair head can boast,
> Shall draw such envy as the Lock you lost.
> For, after all the murders of your eye,
> When, after millions slain, your self shall die;
> When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,
> And all those tresses shall be laid in dust;
> This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
> And 'midst the stars inscribe *Belinda*'s name!
>
> (v. 141–50)

Her name, in effect, will survive only because Pope wrote about her. This is a highly traditional piece of audacity on the poet's part, and a striking one coming from a

very young man with plenty of enemies. It is also a strategy by which a man triply disadvantaged by his body, his religion, and his politics can stake a claim to a compensatory cultural power. In a letter to Caryll in 1711 thanking him for his praise of his poetry, Pope had commented that in his "own eyes," with regard to "his own person," he seemed "not the great Alexander Mr Caryll is so civil to, but that little Alexander the women laugh at" (Sherburn 1956: vol. 1, 114). At the end of the *Rape*, as in "Eloisa," the confidence that praise like Caryll's had helped to consolidate comes into its own, asserting, in the face of his heroines' suffering, the power of his art to transcend the anguish of division between and within human beings.

When the 29-year-old poet published these poems along with other highlights of his early career in 1717, "in publishing a volume of *Works* he was engaging in an act of self-promotion that any celebrated 79-year-old contemporary would have blenched at" (McLaverty 2001: 46). The effrontery is compounded by a handsome portrait frontispiece. This could not, of course, cancel readers' knowledge of his deformity and disability. Nor did the success of his poems make him any more enthusiastic about the well-meaning attempts of friends to point him toward suitable marriage partners (Rumbold 1989: 4). But his poems could offer their heroines, and, through them, the divided psyches of their culture, a vision of integration through the transcendence of art. In his real-life attempts to help women in trouble, Pope sometimes exasperated the men officially charged with their welfare (Rumbold 1989: 103–8); but in these poems the urge to reparation and appropriation is sublimated into a masculine performance that is authoritatively his own, that of the poet who articulates the dividedness of his culture, registers its ironies, contradictions, and inadequacies, and figures the restoration of its originary loss by translating its victims into the immortality of art.

See also chs. 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 26, "Epic and Mock-Heroic"; 31, "The Constructions of Femininity."

References and Further Reading

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12
Jonathan Swift, the "Stella" Poems

Ros Ballaster

> . . . no *Poem* was ever written with a better Design for the Service of the *Sex*: Wherein our *Author* hath observed to a Tittle, the Precepts of his Master *Horace*; or, indeed, hath gone very far beyond him, in the Article of *Decency*. ("A Modest Defence of a Late Poem by an unknown Author, call'd, The Lady's Dressing-Room" [1732], in *Prose Works*, vol. 5 [1962], 338)

Thus Jonathan Swift defends his poem "The Lady's Dressing Room" of 1732 with the claim that the aim, or end, of the poem is to promote cleanliness in women. Indeed, Swift complains that women's revulsion at the inflammatory language of the poem is misplaced, since the "decent *Irish Poet*" has avoided the "plain, slovenly Words" of his preceptor, Horace, and skipped "over a Hundred dirty places, without fowling his Shoes" (*Prose Works*, 340). Hence, the means do not so much justify the ends (as in "foul" satirical language being justified by the end of promoting cleanliness) as conform to the ends (both the poetic language and the poetic object are kept "clean" by the poet). Yet Swift's readers frequently experience a sudden reversal at the "end" of a piece of writing which undercuts their identification with the "means" or "mediator" of the message, the narrator (Gulliver, the "modern author" of *A Tale of a Tub*) or speaker/protagonist (Strephon in "The Lady's Dressing Room").

"The Lady's Dressing Room" illustrates this subversive reversal. The effect of riffling through the tawdry remnants of his mistress Celia's beauty regime in her boudoir on Strephon, the male protagonist of the poem, is a form of synaesthesia, where the sight of a woman prompts a Lockean association with the unpleasant odors he encountered there. The speaker of the poem concludes that Strephon should stop his nose in order to enjoy the ravishment of the eye unadulterated, so that he can admire "Such order from confusion sprung, / Such gaudy *tulips* raised from *dung*" (ll. 143–4). Paradoxically, clarity of sight can be achieved only through the suppression of another sense. Equally, the reader's understanding or enlightenment comes at the expense of the mediating figure, Strephon, whom we blame for the fragility of an attachment

which can be shattered by the simple disclosure of Celia's fleshly condition. However, the unnamed speaker of the poem turns the tables once more. Throughout the poem, he has been a reluctant companion to Strephon's explorations: he complains, "The stockings why should I expose, / Stained with the moisture of her toes" (ll. 51–2), and "Why, Strephon, will you tell the rest? / And must you need describe the chest?" (ll. 69–70). Strephon is cast as spiteful in his exposure of his mistress's "hidden parts" (exposing her dirty linen), but by the end of the poem the poet's sympathies have shifted from Celia to Strephon: "I pity wretched Strephon, blind / To all the charms of womankind" (ll. 129–30). Put simply, the endings of Swift's writings often subvert his openings, just as Celia's "odds and ends," the waste from her body, undermine her lover's first idealization of her apparently perfect and clean physical form.

The "means" to Swift's larger "end" of moral instruction or satirical exposure is frequently the figure of woman: humanist understanding that man is composed of both flesh and spirit is arrived at through the satirical representation of women. The fact that women are not the target, the end of the satire, but the "means," the "signifier" rather than the "signified" of the satirist's intent, does not necessarily exempt Swift from the charge of misogyny. It is clear that for Swift women are not the "cause" of vice (as they so often appear to be for his friend and contemporary, Alexander Pope) but rather its barometer; yet the pursuit of his "end" (the hostile representation of vice) often rebounds on the means (the figure of woman).

"The Lady's Dressing Room," frequently labeled a "misogynist" poem and clearly in the satirical tradition that uses the female as a metaphor for a debased and copious materiality that challenges the spiritual and intellectual integrity of the masculine creative spirit (see Nussbaum 1984), might seem an obvious target for the feminist critic. It is not the only candidate: the series of poems Swift composed in the 1720s to his friend, companion, possible lover, and long-time correspondent Esther Johnson, the majority of them annual birthday tributes to her as his "muse," also demonstrate this tendency to turn upon the female figure in an act of aggression that exceeds her apparent function within the text. Swift appears to have named Esther after the famously idealized mistress of the speaker in Philip Sidney's late sixteenth-century sequence *Astrophel and Stella* in order to play comically upon his own muse's plump and aging domesticity by contrast with Sidney's eternally beautiful court mistress, although the choice of name – transposed into its Latin form – may have also been prompted by the similarity of Esther's name to the Greek term for star (*aster*) (Doody 2003: 97).

In the spring of 1720 Swift fell ill and, in place of the annual birthday poem, he offered Stella two poems, "To Stella, Visiting Me in My Sickness" and "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed His Poems." The latter poem refers to the manuscript collection of nineteen poems transcribed in Stella's hand into a small 85-leaf quarto which she appears to have commenced around 1719, when Swift began to write poems to her (see Woolley 1989). Swift's poem commences by arguing that the workmen are always obscured by the fame of the architect in the erection of a building, but that it is Stella who has brought together his "scattered rhymes" so that they can endure.

However, at the virtual midway point of the poem (at the 83rd of 144 lines), Swift suddenly alters the direction of his poem, indeed repossesses the claim to virtuous "authority" and "authorship" from Stella:

> Stella, when you these lines transcribe,
> Lest you should take them for a bribe;
> Resolved to mortify your pride,
> I'll here expose your weaker side.

He then invites Stella to transcribe his complaint that her temperament is too quick to fire when criticized. It is not only Stella's handwriting, it appears, which resembles that of her mentor/tutor/companion, the poet Swift. The poem becomes a test of Stella's ability to accept his friendly blame, proven by her willingness to copy his text uncorrupted:

> Say Stella, when you copy next,
> Will you keep strictly to the text?
> Dare you let these reproaches stand,
> And to your failing set your hand?
> Or if these lines your anger fire,
> Shall they in baser flames expire?
> Whene'er they burn, if burn they must,
> They'll prove my accusation just.
> (ll. 137–44)

The poem has shifted from panegyric or "familiar" exchange to a hostile battle of wits in which Stella can "win" only through submission. Should she burn the paper rather than transcribe it, Swift's claim that she cannot accept criticism will be justified. Should she transcribe Swift's words, she will "disprove" his accusation but confirm his mastery over her "hand." Here, then, the woman as "means" (transcribing hand) is also the "end," the object of an aggression which seeks to correct her and quite literally "bring her into line."

"Best Pattern of true Friends, beware": The Ambivalence of Friendship

Jonathan Swift first met Esther (or Hester) Johnson, in 1689, when she was eight and he was in his early twenties. The Irish-educated ambitious young man, estranged from most of his family except his mother and fatherless from birth, entered the household of the retired diplomat Sir William Temple at Moor Park in Surrey and quickly

formed attachments with his employer and the favored but frail little girl whose education he quickly assumed. Although his relationship with Temple cooled as the tedium of Moor Park set in and Swift did not enjoy the advancement he had hoped from his employment, his affection for the little Esther continued to grow. William Temple's death in 1699 left Esther financially embarrassed. She and her older companion, a poor relation of the Temples named Rebecca Dingley, entered the service of William Temple's widowed sister Martha, Lady Giffard, in London, but by 1701 they had made arrangements to move to Dublin and establish themselves there under Swift's official guardianship. Swift paid Esther Johnson £50 per annum, no small sum from his salary, to maintain her household in Dublin. Since his departure from Moor Park in 1694, he had been ordained a priest in the Church of Ireland and in 1700 was installed as prebendary of St. Patrick's Cathedral. But almost as soon as Esther and Rebecca arrived in Dublin he left for England as chaplain to Lord Berkeley, and within the year had published his first political pamphlet. Between September 1710 and September 1713 he wrote a series of letters to Esther and Rebecca from London, where he was extending his network of literary and political friendships and developing his Tory principles. These letters were posthumously titled the "Journal to Stella" by their editor, Thomas Sheridan, in a 1784 edition of Swift's works, although Swift appears not to have bestowed the name until he began to write his birthday poems to her in March 1719. In London, Swift's attentions had turned to a lovely young Irish society lady named Hester Vanhomrigh (the "Vanessa" of his poem "Cadenus and Vanessa"), who followed him to Dublin on his return in 1714 but was subsequently estranged from him. Swift appears to have gone to considerable effort to conceal the possibly sexual and certainly flirtatious nature of this relationship from the woman with whom he shared a similarly eroticized mentor–pupil dynamic, Esther Johnson. Although much younger than her rival, Hester/Vanessa died in 1723, making no mention of Swift in her will, her hostility possibly exacerbated by rumors that Swift and Esther had secretly married around 1716. It was probably around the time of Hester Vanhomrigh's death that Esther became aware of the nature of Swift's relationship with this other woman, when manuscript copies of the poem "Cadenus and Vanessa" were circulating. Esther herself was to die after a long period of illness in 1728; Swift lived on until 1745.

David Nokes suggests that "It is probable that it was the reactivation of Swift's feelings for Vanessa which motivated him to begin his series of birthday verses for Stella in an attempt to restore the balance, and split his worship evenly between the two 'nymphs' " (Nokes 1985: 250). This is a plausible explanation for the bizarre and incipiently hostile conceit which governs the first poem of the series, an attractive squib of nine couplets entitled "Stella's Birth-day, 1719" (first published in *Miscellanies* 1728 and the first of the "Stella" poems in Esther Johnson's manuscript book). Here, Swift requests that Stella, twice the age and twice the size of the sixteen-year-old "brightest virgin on the green" (l. 6) so fondly remembered, be split by the gods into a "pair / Of nymphs" (ll. 11–12), and he in turn will plead "To split my worship too in twain" (l. 18).

Like his more famous later work, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), this poem plays on distortions of size and proportion, not least in its opening line, which discreetly knocks four years off the real age of the addressee of a birthday poem (Stella was thirty-eight at the time) and adds six years to her age when he first saw her (she was eight). Indeed, the poem comically plays with these numbers; two eight-line stanzas produce a sixteen-line poem which recreates the early blooming girl from its two parts. There is, however, a covert aggression in a poem that plays throughout with ideas of doubleness. This theme invokes the sense of their coupled relationship, a relationship in which each mirrors or imitates the other. But this is no easy equilibrium, no golden mean in relationship. Swift calls upon the gods to give him the authority to manipulate Stella's image to restore his memory of her, and in turn it is the image of the split Stella which leads to his desire to split his "worship" of her so that both Stellas can have their own "swain"; she authorizes his self-division.

The strained "doubleness" of the relationship is apparent in the second poem addressed directly to Stella, "To Stella, Visiting Me in My Sickness." Swift was ill in early 1720 and Stella's birthday fell in March, circumstances that together suggest this poem was intended to take the place of the birthday tribute, established as an annual offering the previous year. The conceit of this 124-line poem (the occasions when Swift claims that personal circumstances or lack of inspiration have inhibited his production of a poem to Stella often, paradoxically, generate the longest works) is that Pallas, goddess of wisdom, has given Stella the gift of "honour" to protect humankind from the otherwise too dazzling effects of her wit and beauty. The poem goes on to claim that honor is the "spirit of the soul," the secular equivalent of faith in divinity. We might speculate that here Swift imagines himself as faith and Stella as honor, a twinning of the secular and the spiritual, the female and the male, the domestic woman and the clergyman. Stella's honor makes her a loyal friend, a courageous soul.

Honor is a strange virtue to celebrate in a poem which is expressly announced as written in praise of Stella's feminine tenderness and sympathy in coming to visit the sick poet. And the poem turns in the last two stanzas to undermine the position of the preceding eight, precisely at the moment when it introduces the first person, the figure of the ailing male speaker, Swift himself. On his "sickly couch" he finds Stella running to tend to him and restore his sinking spirits. In the last stanza he addresses her directly, warning that her tenderness puts her own life at risk (she may catch his illness):

> Best pattern of true friends, beware;
> You pay too dearly for your care,
> If, while your tenderness secures
> My life, it must endanger yours.
> For such a fool was never found,
> Who pulled a palace to the ground,

Only to have the ruins made
Materials for an house decayed.
(ll. 117–24)

Stella's "honour" (her masculine side) is put at risk by her feminine "tenderness," which may cause the "palace" of her feminine frame to decline, leaving behind only the "ruins" on which to try to build a decayed house (either that of her own health or, more dramatically, Swift without her companionship after her death). Her honor should have led her away from her friend's bedside rather than to it. Of course, this is a gentle compliment to the concern of a friend. Coupled, however, with the other poem written in the same year to Stella, and in the light of the others addressed to her, it contributes to a characteristic picture of, if not aggression and hostility, at least a desire to always have the last word and the upper hand in the relationship, to set its terms even while citing Stella as its controlling spirit.

"To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed His Poems" opens on the closing image of "To Stella, Visiting Me in My Sickness," that of the erection of a building, and returns to the image of the fire, suggesting that the poems themselves might be coupled. And, as discussed earlier, it traces the same line, from praise and admiration to chastisement and "correction" of a behavior which puts his subject and her admirer at risk. Here, then, the Promethean "fire that forms a manly soul" of the sister poem now appears as Stella's "spirits," which "kindle to a flame, / Moved with the lightest touch of blame" (ll. 87–8). These in turn are likened to "Etna's fire, / Which, though with trembling, all admire" (ll. 105–6), allowing a more positive spin on her personality; the volcanic spirit of his subject protects and nurtures those she loves, just as the volcano produces "generous wines" (l. 112) on its slopes. Yet, the sun's heat not only "Ripens the grape" but also "the liquor sours" (l. 120). Throughout the Stella poems, Swift rings the changes on the characteristics he identifies in Stella, offering two readings even within a single line. Here too Stella is firmly put in her place, deployed to reveal the virtuosity of her poet-admirer. Finally, the image of volcanic flame is reduced to the more domestic and literal notion of the burnt paper, the verses she may choose to confine to the flames rather than transcribe and so admit her own failing while also correcting it through the physical act of transcription. Yet, the image of the flame carries still a possible double meaning. "Whene'er they burn, if burn they must, / They'll prove my accusation just" (ll. 143–4): the letters may be burnt upon Stella's mind as an indelible memory even as their physical existence is erased through being set alight.

The vehicle for the representation of Stella shifts in Swift's next annual tribute to her (which also appeared in the 1728 *Miscellanies*). Stella and the poem to Stella are now figured as a building, no longer a "palace" or a "lofty pile," but rather a familiar and hospitable inn. Swift depicts Stella as the Angel Inn, with her "neat" chamber (her cleanliness is, as elsewhere in the poetry, a key marker of her virtue) and "reasonable bills" that prompt travelers to return despite the more alluring signs and fronts of her

neighbors and rivals, Doll and Chloe. Although Stella's eyes are now "fainting rays" (l. 22) her "breeding, humour, wit, and sense" are full recompense for her guests (l. 25). The concluding stanzas of this 56-line poem turn its aggression not on its subject but on these rivals, warning Chloe that despite her attempts to malign the aging Stella, the latter will continue, despite grey hair and wrinkles, to attract "All men of sense" (l. 55) to her doors. This is the first of the poems to Stella which makes quite explicit the relations of exchange that underpin this apparently amiable and convivial hospitality. The image of Stella as an inn (and the name "Angel" invokes in the early modern tradition not just the "divine" but also the monetary, since the angel is a coin as well as a heavenly body) reminds us that Stella extends her friendship to maintain her livelihood. Stella, we are told, puts her guests

> to so small expense:
> Their mind so plentifully fills,
> And makes such reasonable bills;
> So little gets for what she gives,
> We really wonder how she lives!
> And had her stock been less, no doubt
> She must have long ago run out.
> ("Stella's Birthday. Written
> in the Year 1720–21," ll. 26–32)

When the exchange structure is made explicit, the latent hostility toward the poem's subject is displaced onto another woman. It seems as though Swift is easier in figuring his relationship with Stella as one of exchange (albeit a mysterious and unequal process whereby she appears to flourish even though she asks for little); it promotes less anxiety than other images of connection, diverts the kneejerk, irritable turn of the speaker against the dependence his relationship with "Stella" engenders.

However, the balance once more seems to have lost equilibrium in the next birthday poem, "To Stella on her Birthday. Written AD 1721–1722," found in Esther's manuscript but not published until 1766. This 20-line poem is positively brusque and dismissive of its subject: "You, every year the debt enlarge, / I grow less equal to the charge" (ll. 7–8). Indeed, the poem implies that it is not simply accidental or contingent that "In you, each virtue brighter shines, / But my poetic vein declines" (ll. 9–10). In fact, Swift wrote most of his major poetry in his sixties, so there is no indication that his poetic muse suffered a general decline with age. Rather, this poem, through the conventional compliment of the subject exceeding the skill of its depictor, suggests that Stella is now not so much a means to his poetic ends as an impediment to them, and may even bring about the "end" of his poetic skill. The poem envisages not only the end of his poetry but the end of his life – a life ending in debtors' prison for unpaid debts to Stella: "And thus, my stock of wit decayed; / I dying leave the debt unpaid" (ll. 17–18). It may be no coincidence that the relationship with Hester Vanhomrigh was at its emotional peak at this point. Indeed, Swift, a posthumous son himself, nominates a posthumous heir, Patrick Delany the Dublin

churchman, to take his place and repay the debt left by his poetic father. He will die in debt "Unless Delany as my heir, / Will answer for the whole arrear" (ll. 19–20). Stella is now parceled off to another poet-churchman who can take responsibility for her poetic care and celebration.

The poem of the following year is a longer and more involved development of the theme of creative poverty. "Stella's Birthday (1723)" (first published in *Miscellanies*, 1728) is a long comic hybrid of love poem, anacreontic celebration of wine and conviviality, and Swift's characteristically playful use of the figures and voices of domestic servants in his poetry. Here the tables are turned, in that the paralysis of the relationship between Stella as virtuous muse and Swift as tongue-tied songster is overcome by the introduction of a new "female instrument." The poet, "Forsaken by the inspiring nine" (i.e. muses) asks Apollo for his assistance. Apollo sends him to the housekeeper Mrs. Brent, the priestess of the god of the earth who is "nine ways looking" (she had a cast in her eye) to mark the spot in the cellar where a bottle of wine can be discovered which "in the spacious womb contains / A sovereign medicine for the brains" (ll. 69–70). The female "instruments" – Stella, Mrs. Brent, the womb-shaped bottle – enable Swift to write a poem which is not about them, but a comic and inverted meditation on the notion of creativity: here a creativity derived from the earth, from the low, from the material, rather than from the divine or the spirit or the soul. The "means," it appears, are the "end" in this poem, which reveals the necessarily earthly and fleshly nature of creativity, even while it invokes the mock-heroic apparatus of gods, fates, priestesses, and muses. And, of course, the poem offers a mixed compliment, implying that the poet needs to be inebriated to create a tribute to his muse/mistress.

Between April and October of that year, Esther Johnson visited their mutual friend, Charles Ford, at Woodpark, some eleven miles from Dublin. Swift appears to have written two poems to her about this visit, according to the evidence of their manuscript transcription by Ford as two fragments divided by a double line and a Latin quotation. Ford headed the first fragment "Stella's Distress, on the 3rd fatal day of October 1723" (ll. 25–40 of the composite poem), referring to the theme of the section that concerns Stella's unhappiness at returning to her modest lodgings in Dublin after months of pastoral luxury at Woodpark. The other, untitled, fragment constitutes the remainder of the 92-line poem. Ford, referred to as "Don Carlos," is described in terms similar to those used of Strephon in the later "Lady's Dressing Room" as a figure prompted by "a merry spite" (l. 1) who by lines 23–4 "now began to find / His malice work as he designed." The more overt parallel is that Don Carlos plays Milton's Satan to Stella's Eve in this brief mock-epic, tempting her to gustatory pleasures and the phantasm of authority and power where she plays "mistress" of his luxurious house, only to discover that the simple pleasures of her own table no longer satisfy on her return. Stella returns to her lodgings and attempts to compensate for their meanness by aping the experience at Woodpark, summoning wine and a supper that deplete her resources, until a week later she is obliged to return to "her former scene. / Small beer, a herring, and the Dean" (ll. 71–2). As with the other Stella poems, the

concluding lines institute a turn, marked by the introduction of the first-person voice of the poet. Here too the line between mockery and chastisement is acknowledged as a narrow one. "Thus far in jest. Though now I fear / You think my jesting too severe" (ll. 73–4). Swift apologizes, claiming that he has exaggerated the meanness of her circumstances, admiring the fact that her table is always "neat" (cleanliness again the marker of virtue) and concluding with a compliment to Stella that:

> The virtue lies not in the place:
> For though my raillery were true,
> A cottage is Woodpark with you.
> (ll. 90–2)

Just as "Stella's Birthday (1723)" plays with the anacreontic verse, this poem plays with the familiar contrast between town and country, the urbane satire and rude pastoral; and here too, Swift cannot resist stamping his variant on a familiar theme with his own presence, the "I" which succeeds in transforming a public and well-worn type of poetry into a personal address that makes both speaker and addressee individuals in a relationship of playful and productive tension rather than mere representative types.

The birthday poem of the next year, "To Stella, written on the day of her birth, but not on the subject, when I was sick in bed" (written in 1724 but not published until 1765), sees both Swift and Stella unwell. Yet despite the equality of their circumstances (Swift suffering from his recurrent problems of deafness and vertigo, and Stella increasingly fragile), the poem is preoccupied with inequalities: that Swift cannot produce his "yearly pay" of the verse he owes Stella on her March birthday because of his illness, that her tenderness and solicitude only keep him alive to suffer more pains, that she returns his "brutish passions" when he is suffering with "soft speech" and gives him assistance when she is in want of it. The moment of direct address comes at lines 29–30, when Swift enters in the first person ("Whatever base returns you find / From me, dear Stella, still be kind"), and requests that Stella "reap the fruit" (l. 31) in her own heart of her kindness, with a promise that when he is "out of pain" (l. 33) he will "be good again" (l. 34). He advises that, in the meantime, she turn to their other friends to "make amends" for his follies (l. 36) by acknowledging her virtues. Of course, the paradox of the poem is that while it disavows poetry when overcome with physical sickness, it does so in poetic form. Stella becomes the means that makes poetry possible, despite the poet's fallen and brutish nature, governed only by physical pain.

Stella is, moreover, also cast as a "mean," a model of balance, as a "Stoic" who can come to terms with sickness and put her own cares aside to care for another, while the poet is a creature of extremity: "With gall in every word I speak" (l. 12). Indeed, the poem itself acts as a kind of gall or poison which must be expelled from the suffering body to offer the possibility of relief. When Swift asks: "Tormented with incessant pains, / Can I devise poetic strains?" (ll. 1–2), it is tempting to read the "strains" of passing a poem as equivalent to the "strains" of passing urine or feces or gallstones.

Swift "passes" his annual tribute to Stella with difficulty; but it is also a "means" to his improvement.

The careful balance of opposing qualities that constitutes the relationship between Swift and Stella, and the vigor of the relationship despite shifts and reversals in that balance, is amply demonstrated in the 1725 "Stella's Birthday" (first published in the 1728 *Miscellanies*). This is the first of the last three poems Swift wrote for Esther Johnson and it marks, following the death of Vanessa, a new calmness and confidence in the relationship as the ground of his poetic capacity, while also acknowledging the increasing precariousness of its continuance in light of Stella's advancing ill-health. The poem opens on the opposition of textual means to celebrate a mistress, setting prose/speech (suitable to a lady of advancing years such as Stella, now forty-three, and her 56-year-old balladeer) against poetry/song (suited to the fifteen-year-old nymph and her 21-year-old swain). It concludes on the opposition of physical means to appreciate a mistress, setting against one another the senses of sight and hearing: the poet's fading eyesight means that, despite her graying locks and wrinkles, Stella still looks lovely to him, and he hopes that he may retain his hearing so that he can continue to hear her speak the words of "Honour and virtue, sense and wit" (l. 50) that guarantee her status as muse for him. As in "The Lady's Dressing Room," the failure to exploit a sense to the full is the only guarantor of continuing idealism; the poet refuses to listen to those with better eyesight who report that she is "no longer young" (l. 36), claiming that "nature, always in the right, / To your decays adapts my sight" (ll. 43–4). Swift "adapts" his poetry to bring it closer to the condition of prose so that it "fits" his aging muse better, just as his eyesight "adapts" to ensure her continuing status as his muse by concealing her "decays" from him. Swift here plays with the conceit that the unusual nature of his muse makes possible an "unusual," adaptive, and hybrid poetry, a poetry that, if it shuns the condition of song, can still celebrate the sense of hearing, by contrast with traditional love poetry which shuns the prosaic and grounds its aesthetic on the pleasures of looking at an admired object.

In the same year, another poem to Stella also challenges conventional expectations of the poem of compliment with its startling couplet "Why, Stella, should you knit your brow, / If I compare you to the cow?" ("A Receipt to Restore Stella's Youth," ll. 21–2, first published in the 1735 *Works*). Esther Johnson had spent a long period at Quilca, Richard Sheridan's house in County Cavan, where Swift also stayed from the end of April to the end of September 1725. Swift develops in the poem a comic simile whereby Stella is cast as a cow which is starved over winter until spring comes, when it is put out to pasture to be fattened up. Swift informs Stella that after this period of fleshing out,

> if your flesh and blood be new,
> You'll be no more your former *you*;
> But for a blooming nymph will pass,
> Just fifteen, coming summer's grass.
> (ll. 37–40)

Of course, this is not so much a new Stella as a restored one, the teenage virgin Stella on the green described in the first birthday poem. The poem plays throughout with the conceit that, just as Quilca's pastoral pleasures and diets will "fill out" and re-invigorate Stella's wasted body, the poet's memory and attachment constantly renews her. The poem concludes with the suggestion that Stella must return to the physician-poet to secure the good restorative effects of the country spring:

> But, lest you should my skill disgrace,
> Come back before you're out of case;
> For if to Michaelmas you stay,
> The new-born flesh will melt away.
> (ll. 49–52)

Stella will, like the cow, become thin again over the winter period, while in Dublin the poet will feed her up with "beef and claret" (l. 56) – but the more sinister underlying association of the simile is that the cow is fattened only in order to be slaughtered to provide that very "beef and claret" the poet promises her. The poet's "skill" is needed to "preserve" Stella's life, but there is something oddly light-hearted about Swift's open acknowledgement of the logical "end" of the simile he has deployed, the inevitability of Stella's physical death and the possibility of her continuing life only as a poetic figure in his verse.

There is nothing light-hearted, however, about the last and best of Swift's poems to Stella, written in the shadow of that death in 1727. Swift took the poem with him to England, where he traveled a month after her March birthday. He returned in the autumn, and she died on 28 January 1728. The poem was published in the 1728 *Miscellanies*. It is Swift's most attractive and moving tribute to the long friendship that had sustained him through his adult life. It shares the structure of many of the birthday poems, in that it moves from an address to Stella. combining instruction and admiration, to a first-person statement by the poet that implies his separateness from her even as it acknowledges her gift of friendship. The poem has a simple message: it attempts to reconcile Stella to her mortality by asserting that her virtue and tenderness, which have touched many lives, will leave a lasting legacy. Swift announces the solemnity of this last poem early on when he requests that Stella "From not the gravest of divines, / Accept for once some serious lines" (ll. 13–14). He then turns to request Stella to look back on her past life with content because it has entailed the preservation of so many other lives from sickness or infamy. Even when her physical body is gone, her virtue will continue to "feed" the lives of those who knew her. Although the poem is punctuated by three direct invocations to Stella ("Say, Stella, feel you no content, / Reflecting on a life well spent?" [ll. 35–6], "Believe me Stella" [l. 67], "O then, whatever heaven intends, / Take pity on your pitying friends" [ll. 79–80]), it lacks the corrective aggression of so many of the earlier poems and seems designed to reconcile Stella to her situation rather than challenge her. It

concludes on a testimony to his commitment to her, requesting her not to think her friends "unkind" (l. 82):

> Me, surely me, you ought to spare,
> Who gladly would your sufferings share;
> Or give my scrap of life to you,
> And think it far beneath your due;
> You, to whose care so oft I owe,
> That I'm alive to tell you so.
> (ll. 83–8)

Stella's end produces a poem that refutes the idea of an "end." If they can no longer plan their future together, the couple can look back over Stella's past and she will continue to inhabit the future of all her friends. And in this last poem, for the first time, Swift presents himself as Stella's instrument, implying that he might be the "means" for her own consolation and reconciliation to her fate. For the last time the balance of the relationship tips, so that Stella is no longer the "means" for Swift's poetic creativity, but he becomes the means to restore her reason, to give her her own "raison d'être."

"Not the gravest of divines": The Twist in the Tale

Do these readings take Swift's consistently light and self-consciously trivial poetry too seriously? Like Swift's anxious modern author, have we tied the texts into epistemological knots that conceal or obscure their simple message(s)? Swift seems to conceive of the poem itself as a parodic intervention, a moment of address, rather than a developed piece of exposition. And his tone is invariably comic and mocking. This is equally or especially true of the poems to Stella, making comedy a vital part of their originality as experiments in the love poem, a mode, as Margaret Anne Doody notes, unusual in eighteenth-century versifying (Doody 2003: 98).

Swift consistently reminds both his muse and his reader that his poetry to her is not prompted by a sexual, conjugal, or romantic passion:

> Thou, Stella, wert no longer young,
> When first for thee my harp I strung:
> Without one word of Cupid's darts,
> Of killing eyes, or bleeding hearts:
> With friendship and esteem possessed,
> I ne'er admitted love a guest.
> ("To Stella, Who Collected and
> Transcribed His Poems," ll. 9–14)

His Stella cuts a pedestrian figure; but her virtues are solid and lasting, whereas the beauty of the muses of other poets fades before the poem is even completed. Indeed, Stella *is* a poem, the lines of her face and of her figure familiar and often traced by the loving hand of the poet, and returned to at regular intervals as a familiar site and citation, as well as measure of his poetic abilities. Yet the very doubleness and dependence of the relationship between poet and muse (however material and matter-of-fact) can threaten the former's creative authority. If Stella is a text, she is also a transcriber, and Swift "corrects" or "balances" their relationship by requiring her, like a good parson or monkish scribe, to "keep strictly to the text" in her copying of his chastising text – but also, perhaps, more widely, in her imitation of his prescripts for female behavior.

Swift's verse is no mere imitation or copy of his mistress/muse, then; it "composes" her, turns her into a textual figure, but also calms her too violent spirits, which threaten to resist his creative authority. Swift had learnt this technique from his long acquaintance with the Horatian tradition of satire with which this reading opened: the satiric target is first inflated into a consuming threat and then comically defused. But in this process, it is not only the poetic "vehicle" (the figure of Stella) that is transformed, but the "tenor" (the voice of the poet). Swift succeeds in producing a poetry which, precisely because of its prosaic tone, its directness of address, its self-questioning and self-mockery, challenges both the "means" and "end" of poetry itself. The neoclassical, controlled, confident relationship of poet and poetic subject is given new vigor conveying a sense of genuine "ethics," in the traditional sense of "ethos," from the Greek term for "character" or "prevailing sentiment" of an individual or community. Swift's poems to his Stella are "ethical" texts in that they portray the complex, individual, local, and shifting nature of the continuing encounter between self and other, in and through which both parties are repeatedly required to question and adapt their perceptions of relationship and of the role each plays in the other's life. And, in turn, an acquaintance with Swift's poems to Stella requires us to re-adjust our own preconceptions of a personality unable to sustain or address relationships with women. Despite its tensions and conflicts, this depiction of a friendship in verse presents us with a male poet willing and able to allow his poetic object a life beyond that of simple "means" or "spur" to poetic creativity, a life which, especially toward its own end, touches and alters the fabric of the verse it engenders.

See also chs. 11, "ALEXANDER POPE, *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK* AND 'ELOISA TO ABELARD'"; 31, "THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF FEMININITY."

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13

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Six Town Eclogues* and Other Poems

Isobel Grundy

As a girl of about fourteen, Lady Mary Pierrepont (later Wortley Montagu) neatly transcribed into first one and then another handsome blank volume an ambitious collection of poems that emulate such respected models as Abraham Cowley, Katherine Philips, and Aphra Behn. She gave the first volume a self-defining preface, and arranged its successor's title-page like a printed "Complete Works." This upper-class girl presents herself as a serious poet, even though in a memorable image she sees the poet (male of course) as "haughty in rags, and proudly poor," disdaining the rich nobleman who could be her father (Grundy 1999: 18, 20). To write poet was to write outsider, to shed both class and gender. In middle-aged exile Montagu equated herself with a dead poet in a Latin inscription that copies her old model, Cowley. In old age she wrote of herself as haunted by the Muses, like a witch possessed by devils (Montagu 1965–7: vol. 2, 315–17; vol. 3, 190).

All this suggests a poetic career: something to which few women aspired, though they might publish a poetry volume, or anticipate posthumous publication. Philips died too soon for us to be certain whether she sought publication or not. Behn was chiefly occupied with the stage, dedications, fiction: all the business of earning. But the prominence of these women in Montagu's early work emphasizes that not all her influences were male.

Her surviving poems, however, suggest in their genres and origins the desultory or reactive rather than the focused or proactive. Most respond to some stimulus of the moment, occasionally celebrating but more often arguing, critiquing, or protesting. The rhythms, diction, conventions, and habitual turns of Restoration and early eighteenth-century poetry were evidently as familiar to her mind as prose: within their confines she felt free to address, in widely various styles, a wide range of emotional and intellectual topics both public and private, assuming the voices of imagined characters both wholly fictional and drawn from life. Yet her datable poems emanate from comparatively restricted periods of her life. Only one important original poem survives from the years that produced her "Embassy Letters" and almost none from

the later years abroad that produced her longer prose fiction and her letters to her daughter. Either she eschewed poetry in the absence of particular stimuli, or else there was much that has not survived. The heaviest identified poetic loss was the "whole trunk full of Lady Mary's letters and verses" that Sir Robert Walpole made Maria Skerrett burn when they married in 1738 (Grundy 1999: 369). Montagu's dependence on the particular occasion means that most current generalizations about her poetry are demonstrably false: for this reason I shall proceed largely by discussion of single poems and shall give particular attention to the "Epistle from Arthur Gray to Mrs. Murray" whose reading is transformed by a radically different understanding of its occasion.

After adolescence, Montagu's most prolific period fell between January 1715 and July 1716: months spent in a London ruled no longer by Queen Anne but by her own Whig party, and closed by her departure from England for Constantinople, where her husband was appointed ambassador. During this time her near-death experience with smallpox brutally cut short the social adulation of her beauty and wit. Her poems of this period sprang from broadened horizons, intense social and literary stimulation, and ambitions for some kind of career or influence in public life.

She herself called these poems "Eclogs." Horace Walpole named them *Six Town Eclogues* when he published them (Montagu 1747), and the name has stuck. They are probably her best-known poems today, although their deep roots in the urban, upper-class social fabric of their time present certain difficulties to the modern reader. Another set of problems arises from a different set of social roots: the exciting new friendship between the aristocratic Lady Mary and the young, middle-class, male poets John Gay and Alexander Pope, virtuosi of the mock form in poetry. Gay had taken Swift's idea of town pastoral (where poetic conventions designed for presenting the innocent countryside are mockingly applied to the wicked, sophisticated, sometimes squalid town) and used it for eclogue, the genre in which simple shepherds declared their devotion to music and girls (Swift 1967: 86, 91–3; Gay 1974: vol. 1, 231ff.). Pope had produced the most famous poem in this broad category: *The Rape of the Lock* (1712, longer version 1714), which is mock-heroic rather than mock-pastoral.

In *The Rape of the Lock* Pope communicates his heady, conflicting perceptions of gender relations among the gilded youth of the court. His poem presents women as shallow, self-centered, frivolous, yet so beautiful that men are their willing slaves. This was not how Montagu saw the world. Less intoxicated than Pope with high society, less censorious of women who lived with double binds she understood, she was nevertheless an equally sharp critic of the social and sexual behavior of both sexes. More than most women of the period, she set out to wrest control of a masculine genre and make it serve her feminine perceptions, even while readers expected her poems to share the attitudes of Pope's and Gay's, and moreover that Pope or Gay must have had a hand in writing them.

The origin of her eclogues bears on any critique of them. The first written and circulated was "Roxana" (later "Monday. Roxana, or The Drawing-Room"). Montagu wrote this some time in March or late February 1715, as a single, free-standing piece.

In it the fat, Tory Duchess of Roxburgh laments her failure to be selected for a position at the court of the newly arrived Caroline, Princess of Wales, wife of the future George II. To members of the upper classes, posts at court were the pinnacle of success and, there being no queen, at this time the princess offered the only pinnacle available. Laments by the unsuccessful were a familiar element in eclogue, as was the way that a speaker's circumstances color his or her opinions. Frustrated female political ambition was (outside drama) a less familiar theme.

Roxana's anger at the woman who has not chosen her shapes the poem. To her, Caroline's advanced views and intellectual interests translate to a deplorable taste for "filthy Plays" – like, specifically, Gay's *The What D'Ye Call It*. Montagu knew there was nothing filthy about *The What D'Ye Call It* except its name. Its most striking feature was its ambivalent tone, which left the audience uncertain whether to cry or laugh. The similar ambivalence in practice of Montagu's poem was probably unintended: if nothing else, the fun poked at Roxana's large size (her "soft sorrows" waft from a body almost too heavy for her sedan-chairmen to lift) indicates that she is a butt of satire (Montagu 1993: 183, 182). Yet the poem was misread, even by contemporaries, as itself an attack on the princess whom the transparently prejudiced Roxana attacks. This poem set a precedent for misreading that has dogged Montagu's career.

Pope or Gay may have suggested that Montagu should write a whole set of poems to go with the first. But, as I have argued elsewhere, their part-authorship is a myth – although Montagu's penchant for collaboration, even in intimate personal poetry, is among her intriguing features (Grundy 1998). The first poem deals with a corner of life where women jockey publicly for position; each of the others brings a specifically female angle to female interests. When he first read her poems, Horace Walpole judged them "too womanish," though he grew to admire them later (Walpole 1937–83: vol. 13, 234; vol. 19, 450). They touch on dilemmas like arranged or forced marriage, the sexual double standard and the vulnerability of sexual reputation, the restricted field in which women deploy their wit, beauty, and illusion of power.

"Tuesday" presents two young rakes comparing scalps: what interests them in the game of love is the public sign of victory, women as currency boosting masculine status. This poem's opening lines sketch two contrasted groups of women: the beauties dressing for the evening's display, and fallen or poverty-stricken women in "tatter'd Riding hoods" slipping into the church to pray (Montagu 1993: 185). In the body of the poem only the beauties are visible, and only through the eyes of men.

In "Tuesday" Patch and Silliander engage in debate, but they are of one mind. "Wednesday" presents a man and woman genuinely at loggerheads. Dancinda receives her lover alone, away from the public gaze, but the tête-à-tête brings only quarreling. Strephon talks of his devotion and wants its reward, actual sexual conquest. Dancinda talks of her honor, and wants to keep the relationship platonic. Each uses the high-flown language of courtly love, but in strictly gendered terms: he ardent, she virginal. Debate ends in interruption by a confidential servant: "Begone, she crys, I'm sure I hear my Lord." Strephon slips away cursing, while Dancinda prepares to meet

"her Dear" – not lover but husband. The interruption also shifts the vocabulary of the poem abruptly from altars and vows to the gloves and hat which Strephon snatches up to depart, thereby transforming timeless lovers into fashionable intriguers (Montagu 1993: 192).

Early comment on this poem turned on the re-evaluation generated by the closing revelation that Dancinda is married, as undermining her expressed desire for a chaste love limited to kissing and gazing: "Love is a Child, and like a Child he plays" (Montagu 1993: 191). Platonism, says this reading, is innocent in a virgin, hypocritical in a sexually initiated woman. This would make the poem parallel Matthew Prior's "Town Eclogue," whose female protagonist entertains the high-flown protestations of one lover while she has another hidden under the bed; a poem directed at the way women make fools of men (Prior 1959: 193–5).

Montagu presents Dancinda more sympathetically. As a woman who reluctantly repels the advances of her would-be seducer, she has something in common with the speaker in the later "Answer to a Love Letter in Verse," who strikes a note not of pathos but of proto-feminist rage. Dancinda knows that once she yields she will be discarded. "Your ardour ceas'd, I then should see you shun / The wretched victim by your Arts undone" (Montagu 1993: 191). Trapped in a presumably non-chosen, presumably loveless marriage, yearning for love, she also retains her self-protectiveness. Though her wishes are unrealistic and their results farcical, she is neither vicious nor frigid, nor a deliberate exploiter of men. It is surprising that this poem, once read as facile anti-feminist accusation (woman as heartless sexual tease), has not attracted more feminist critical attention as presenting a basic female dilemma.

Manuscript evidence suggests that this poem was born in ideological struggle and, like "Monday," has been misread from the start. The version in Montagu's album of fair copies ("wrote by me," says her inscription, "without the assistance of one Line from any other") ends in bathos: "Strephon cursing slips down the back Stairs." But in the yet more handsome copy transcribed by Pope as a gift to Montagu, the interruption causes Dancinda to regret the stand she has taken, so that Strephon is implicitly justified. Montagu energetically crossed this out and restored her own ending; but she kept another alternative conclusion, in which Strephon gets a final speech to assert his combined virility and fidelity, and has his way: "he put out the Light / And all that follow'd, was Eternal Night" (Harrowby MSS 256; Montagu 1993: 192–3).

"Thursday" is comparatively unproblematic. Two women of the world, Cardelia and Smilinda, debate together, comparing not conquests but their chosen fields for conquest: cards or love, the game or the gamester. One describes the rapture of winning, the other the rapture of being adored. The contest is adjudged a tie. Neither woman uses the yearning tone of the other female speakers in the eclogues: both, like Patch and Silliander in "Tuesday," are flying high. Early readers identified the speakers with actual people, the devotee of love (that is, of a particular lover) as Lady Mary herself. Irrespective of this, the poem remains highly unusual in its deflected portrayal of gratified female desire.

"Friday" and "Satturday" are both controversial, "Friday" the most of all. It survives in two versions, only slightly different: one among Montagu's works and one among Gay's. Predictably, in view of the situation outlined above, it has been widely supposed that he wrote it and she plagiarized it, or else (a view expressed in conversation in the 1960s by the distinguished critic Rachel Trickett) that real poetry begins only at the point in the poem (present in Gay's version, absent from Montagu's) where the speaker, Lydia, is visually described in terms of the classic pastoral shepherdess, with exotic pets for flocks: "Shocks, monkeys and mockaws, / To fill the place of Fops, and perjur'd Beaus" (Gay 1974: vol. 1, 181–5).

But Lydia as pathetic, objectified as aging woman discarded for a more recent model (like Dancinda as butt of satire for pretended chastity), is a hackneyed concept, paralleled in other, male poets. I contend that Montagu presents a far more original scenario (Grundy 1998). Though many lines are the same in both poems, the plots are different. Montagu's Lydia (based on an actual woman, center of a current storm of gossip) is not an older woman, and she is being discarded not for her fading charms but because her lover is going back to his wife, who has just borne or is about to bear him a son. She is not a likeable figure, but on the contrary, like Roxana, a markedly bad loser. Montagu's "Friday," unlike Gay's "The Toilette," is about the transience of extra-marital, illicit love, and is therefore, like "Wednesday," a poem about marriage: its compulsory status, its often forced nature, and its failure to meet the desires of women.

"Satturday" is the most familiar of the eclogues, a perennial in anthologies. Like those of "Wednesday" and "Friday," its speaker arouses mixed responses. The anguish of the "wretched" Flavia's "wounded mind" results from the loss of her physical beauty. The last eclogue in a series (like Pope's "Winter") traditionally laments a death: the death here is that of Flavia's looks. The line "Beauty's fled, and . . . are no more" tolls its refrain through the poem. No more dressing, lovers, praise. Montagu wrote this poem, as she freely admitted, "while slowly recovering [from smallpox] under the apprehension of being totally disfigured." At its close Flavia utters a farewell, proposing to "hide in shades this lost Inglorious Face. / Ye Operas, Circles, I no more must view! / My Toilette, Patches, all the World Adieu!" (Montagu 1993: 201–4, 35). I would argue for a deliberate effect of doubleness here. On the one hand, Flavia is utterly sincere: her beauty, power, and popularity have been all the world to her, as to other eclogue speakers. On the other hand, the creator of this beauty-centered world invites the reader, by ending on toilette and patches, to register the narrowness of this world.

Montagu's next datable poem was a topographical epistle addressed from Constantinople (now Istanbul) to her uncle William Feilding: a poem about personal fulfillment, rural retreat, and the passing of time, which conveys strong personal feeling under the guise of formal meditation. Montagu recalls how in the past she wrote of her desired rural retirement in the genre launched by John Pomfret of poems entitled "The Choice" or "The Wish." She had wished for moderation,

harmony, order, and now finds her wish fulfilled in the exotic suburbs of Constantinople, where the January climate invites sitting outdoors, and the view embraces distant, snow-covered Asian peaks, a cityscape, and a foreground of spring flowers. Present delight is to be seized, as in so many flower poems, because it is transitory. Not only is human history ever-changing, as the view itself attests ("How art thou falln, Imperial City, low!"), but so is the natural world. Here in this winterless setting the natural cycle is presented as purely matter for rejoicing: "as the Parent rose decayes and dyes / The infant buds with brighter collours rise / And with fresh Sweets the Mother's-Scent Supplies." But for a pregnant woman (Lady Mary bore her daughter three weeks after writing this poem) mixed feelings adhere to the notion of a new generation replacing the old. The pleasure of rural retirement here is nourished by a horror of the vicious social world and the difficulty of being female in it. The poem closes on dangers escaped: "The thousand Tongues with which she must engage / Who dare have Virtue in a vicious Age" (Montagu 1993: 207–10).

Four broad categories embrace most of Montagu's post-eclogue poems: those relating to the condition of women; those relating to her quarrel with Pope; those relating, usually through song or satire, to other specific, topical occasions; and those of private musing, expressions of feeling or efforts to submit feeling to analysis. Nearly all her individual poems remain compelling today for students of the period and its interests as well as of its poetic voices.

Montagu's proto-feminist public poems continue the direction of the eclogues. She found plenty of occasion during the 1720s for poetry of this kind, concerned as the eclogues are to highlight divergence between actual social conditions and the literary conventions available for discussing them. The death of the recent bride Eleanor Bowes, aged fifteen, provoked from Montagu a remarkably bitter little poem which hails the dead girl as unique in having known happiness in marriage: "Above your Sex, distinguish'd in your Fate, / You trusted, yet experienced no Deceit." This poem makes an outspoken statement about female sexual pleasure, describing the three-month marriage as rapture, bliss, only to be excelled by the joys of heaven (Montagu 1993: 233). Montagu apparently made this statement in philosophical debate with her older, Christian, feminist friend Mary Astell. Astell also devoted a poem to this death, and the two poems were probably written together. A single-sheet manuscript at Hampshire Record Office preserves the two on opposite sides of the paper, each in its author's handwriting, Astell's expressing religious resignation and Montagu's unregenerate rage (Grundy 1999: 240–1).

Other, longer poems further develop her proto-feminist stance. "An Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband" is spoken by a woman who was divorced for her money: her husband (having perhaps tracked her adultery by means of suborned witnesses) sued her lover for £1,500 damages. Here Montagu formulates one of her clearest statements of woman's fully sexual nature and an early explicit condemnation of the sexual double standard:

> Are we not form'd with Passions like your own?
> Nature with equal Fire our Souls endu'd,
> Our Minds as Haughty, and as warm our blood . . .

(Her account of sexual love always involves the mind as well as the body.) Men, she says, maintain a self-aggrandizing belief in women's weakness,

> Yet from this Weakness you suppose is due
> Sublimer Virtu than your Cato knew.
> (Montagu 1993: 231)

This poem remained unpublished until the later twentieth century, omitted until then by all editors of Montagu. (There was no point in omitting the poem on Mrs. Bowes, since it had appeared immediately in newspapers and passed thence into her earliest printed collections.)

Other poems on proto-feminist themes, no less outspoken, address the informal institutions of gallantry, male pursuit of women, and the sanctions operated by society through loss of reputation, rather than the more formal institution of marriage. ("The Answer to the foregoing Elegy," which probably dates from 1733, attacks aspects of marriage – families' sale of young women into mercenary unions with diseased geriatrics – that were conventional, not shocking targets for satirists.) Montagu's voice is more anti-masculinist than those of most of her contemporaries: certainly than Astell or Mary, Lady Chudleigh, Anne Finch or Elizabeth Tollet, probably than Sarah Fyge Egerton or Elizabeth Thomas as well. Predatory males appear in "An Epilogue to . . . Mary Queen of Scots" as "cruel Hunters" of "trembling Game," who "burn to Triumph, and [who] sigh – to tell." The exemplar in "An Answer to a Love Letter in Verse" is likened to a monkey who breaks household objects, a beggar who means to rob if refused alms, and finally to upper-class young thugs playing at footpads: "So the Brisk Wits who stop the Evening Coach / Laugh at the Fear that follows their approach" (Montagu 1993: 272, 241, 245).

Her battle with Pope produced Montagu's most notorious poem: "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace," which is almost certainly collaborative, though her part in it is circumstantially, not certainly, proved. (Lord Hervey's part is documented by manuscript witness, while her – probably larger – part is deduced by circumstantial evidence alone, though very strongly.) Scholars have failed to uncover much about the secretive circumstances of its publication, in two slightly different editions on the same day through one trade publisher and one "mercury" (printer and seller of pamphlets), both of whom specialized in issuing works whose authors would remain untraceable. The shock registered by much early comment on the savagery of this poem was a response partly to Montagu's gender, and partly to ignorance of the entire gamut of attacks both by and against Pope, which were establishing levels of scurrility unequaled since the Restoration (Guerinot 1969; Grundy 1999: 274–8, 285–6, 329–35, 341–55).

This was not Montagu's first sally against Pope. She had chosen the medium of mock-heroic in two untitled passages (known by their opening lines as "Her palace plac'd beneath a muddy road" and "Now with fresh vigour Morn her Light displays"), fragments of a projected, uncompleted, longer work – in which again she had a male collaborator, this time her young cousin Henry Fielding. Each produced an incomplete poem on the same plan, representing Pope and his closest literary associates (particularly Gay and Swift) as a gang of evil-doers modeled on his own dunces, who plan a political and military conquest of the world for Dulness. One single couplet is common to one of Montagu's and one of Fielding's poems. Montagu's vivid, energetic lines depend heavily on speeches by her fictionalized characters: her imagination still leaned towards ventriloquizing, creating both characters and their positions through their speech.

Boldly she reverses the thrust of the *Dunciad*, borrowing Pope's own epic apparatus to transform the creator of Dulness into her favorite son. She incorporates a thumbnail Whiggish sketch of British history since the Reformation, painting the medieval period as Dulness's age of superstition and Catholicism and joining together the rebirth of learning and the birth of Protestantism in a single Renaissance: the overthrow of Dulness. The consequent progress of intellectual enquiry, political liberty, and an educated ruling class has been successively furthered by the literary champions Milton and Addison. The appearance of the latter, however, has provoked a reaction from Dulness, and she is now, under the backward-looking, anti-Enlightenment Tory regime of Queen Anne, gathering an anti-Addisonian party comprising Pope, Gay, and Swift, with Bolingbroke representing its political arm. They aim to repeal both Reformation and Renaissance, and bring back the Dark Ages. This mock-epic outline required a rewriting of recent literary history with the Protestant Old Whigs as the forces of light and the High Church or Tory Catholics as the forces of darkness. The inherent difficulties of this plan may account for the unfinished state of the whole.

These poems contribute something to "Verses . . . to the Imitator," though the latter has no dialogue, being wholly spoken by an unnamed voice pronouncing charge and sentence against Pope. This voice, authoritative yet colloquial, resembles his own in the Horatian imitations. The adversary is now more than a perverter of literature and politics: he is the enemy of humanity. In making her case here Montagu faces a difficulty common to all propagandists against a powerful enemy: how, rhetorically, to arouse hatred without arousing fear, how to depict the enemy as hatefully destructive without allowing him superior power. The use by "Verses . . . to the Imitator" of Pope's actual, historical weaknesses – his humble family background, his deformity – has shocked many readers (from Lady Mary's granddaughter onwards), but lies at the heart of the poem's success as personal satire. Montagu approximates Pope's own skill at identifying and exaggerating an actual character's points of vulnerability, difficulty, or self-contradiction into a full-blown caricature. Her imitator is touchy, painfully conscious of being one-down, and impotent in his attacks: a masterpiece of both likeness and unlikeness to the historical Alexander Pope. The closing lines, dismissing the imitator with the mark of Cain upon him to wander the world under

God's punishment, accord him a kind of perverted grandeur and dignity to match the measured lines of the anathema pronounced against him.

Montagu's final surviving poetic treatment of Pope, her "P[ope] to Bolingbroke," chooses belittlement as its technique, unmoderated by dignifying. Pope, a toadeater or flatterer writing to his patron, condemns himself out of his own mouth (reversing his actual self-construction as heroic fighter for truth). Now, with Gay dead and Swift gone from the London scene, Montagu revives her idea of the alliance of politics with literature to make Bolingbroke her villain. An enemy of the body politic, he is huge in threat though, like her Pope-figure, impotent overall. "Oh, was your Pow'r like your Intention good, / Your native Land would stream with civil blood" (Montagu 1993: 281–2).

Her single attack on Swift – a riposte to a single poem, "The Lady's Dressing Room," and again unashamedly *ad hominem* – is good-humored by comparison. Although it targets exclusively Swift's relations with women, not his political allegiance or cultural aims, it does mention politics as an item in the character's complacency, and philosophy in the form of the Horatian commonplace about the human tendency to mistake one's own talents. From this axiom Montagu elaborately deduces the moral of her story, in the very manner used by Swift in his own poetry. She collapses the fictional Strephon of "The Lady's Dressing Room" with his creator, and provides for Swift a sexually humiliating experience worse than Strephon's.

In tracing Swift's alleged misogyny to sexual rejection and humiliation she chimes with many women writers (from "Jane Anger" in 1598, through Sarah Fyge in *The Female Advocate*, 1686, to her own granddaughter's explanation of Pope's animosity). Montagu's Swift believes, like Patch or Silliander, in his own "Galantry and Wit" (it takes the maid to whisper that he has to pay for his pleasure); this self-satisfaction is hilariously undermined by the narrative of impotence on one side and frustration on the other. Montagu undermines dignity here, not by images of monkeys or porcupines but by discrepancy and bathos. Swift is described on the one hand through his accoutrements, like the rakes of earlier poems, and on the other through his clerical function as the "Doctor," the "Reverend Lover," the "Preist," and "the disapointed Dean." He is not directly excoriated like Pope: his impotence is presented – "and trys – and trys" – from a viewpoint that might be his own. He is, however, comprehensively worsted. Woman-for-sale is woman free from inhibitions of femininity, who holds her own without effort. She "roar'd by God," "answer'd short," and closes the poem with unflinching reference to the very bodily function which had so appalled Swift's Strephon (Montagu 1993: 273–6). The public appearance of this poem (which, like the "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband," was withheld by early editors out of *pudeur* or decorum) sharply extends Montagu's astonishing poetic range.

The "Epistle from Arthur Gray to Mrs. Murray," by contrast, has remained in some sense invisible while in full view. First included by Horace Walpole in Montagu's *Six Town Eclogues. With some other Poems* (published during her absence in Italy) in 1747, it appears to be a straightforward, sentimental plea by a laboring-class man convicted of the attempted rape of his employer's sister-in-law (who was, as a woman

separated from her husband, particularly vulnerable to scandal). Readers before the late twentieth-century feminist moment admired Montagu's apparent *tour de force* of sympathizing across class and gender lines with a servant so much in love that he could not contain himself at the sight of his lady fashionably disheveled as he brought her morning tea to the bedside.

As I have shown elsewhere, a contemporary diarist's report of Arthur Gray's trial suggests a different, more oblique, reading of the poem, which is far more likely to be the true one (Grundy 1999: 226–30). In this reading Montagu's sentimental footman, with his blend of passion, egalitarian self-respect, and uncontrollable lust, is drawn to represent, sardonically, a pure figment of imagination. He embodies a fiction created by Griselda Murray and her family and taken up by the newspapers in order to deflect onto a male servant the charge of sexual incontinence which threatened her. Murray testified that Gray appeared in her bedroom at night, saying he was in love with her and intended to ravish her. Meanwhile the servants of the household (that of the Baillies, her parents) testified that she had a lover of her own class who regularly spent much of the night with her – either tolerated or unsuspected by her relations. Gray had got drunk and boasted that he would uncover the secret by actually obtaining a sight of them in bed together. That is, his real-life crime was voyeurism, not attempted rape: an act of insubordination carried out in the earthy, raucous style of the footman class and not with the high-flown sentiment of the fashionable class. Montagu's depiction of a servant turned courtly lover turned would-be rapist is therefore intended not to convince but outrageously to amuse; not an early example of the sentimental but a pattern of 1720s satire on the multiple hypocrisies in gender relations of the London fashionable classes.

Like the eclogues, and unlike Montagu's poems on Mrs. Bowes or Mrs. Yonge (or Pope), this one does not assign blame, or express outrage, or call for the righting of a wrong. The upper-class young-men-about-town "in embroidery gay," Gray's resented, successful rivals, are closer to her recent Patch and Silliander than to the threatening, beggar-like, robber-like suitors of poems soon to come: they are fatuous rather than dangerous. The poem is entirely inexplicit to readers not in the know – which is to say most, perhaps all, readers since it reached print. Even if this private scandal had not been utterly forgotten, the newspapers at the time had reported the family's side of the story only, and ignored the testimony of Gray's peers, the servants. (Elizabeth Snyder, writing about another Montagu poem, notes the line drawn in legal practice between "reliable" or disinterested witnesses and those with something to gain [Snyder 1997: 12]; in this case it seems that the question of rank actually reversed those categories.) Gray having been convicted, the family had engineered the commutation of the death sentence to transportation. Gray passed across the Atlantic and out of literary history.

It is easy for criticism to remain fixated on the biographical or ideological. Montagu's one-time friend Griselda Murray dropped her after learning this poem's authorship, though she had less ground for complaint than she might have had, for Montagu did not openly challenge the framing of an innocent servant to protect an

upper-class female reputation. Any criticism is coded, subsumed in the fictional portrayal of the goddess figure whose charms are so potent as to endanger their owner. The poet is complicit with this adult woman, for whom it would be social death to be known as sexually active, in not revealing the secret to outsiders; but to anyone in the know it mocks the pious story told in court of beauty and innocence threatened by the raw male sexuality which elevation and refinement cloak but do not modify. What can we make of poetry so resistant to an averagely informed, non-insider reading?

Critics have been exercised over the contrast between "Epistle from Arthur Gray to Mrs. Murray" and the raucous treatment of the same episode in the ballad "Virtue in Danger," almost certainly Montagu's although never acknowledged as such. These two poems, in contrasting styles and voices, have this in common: that they mock what a later age calls "rape myths" (Brownmiller 1975). The epistle mocks (besides the myth of love's uplifting power) the rape myth of irresistible female beauty (to wear a "Nightgown fastened with a single pin" [Montagu 1993: 223] is "asking for it"); the ballad mocks the myth of a woman's desire to be forced. The ballad, too, offers two readings: one to outsiders and one to those in the know. "It never came into her head / To lock her Chamber door" implies possession of a regular lover as easily as dreams of rape. The lady sees her footman's transformation into rapist as his acquiring "some Sense." The account of the actual sexual encounter deploys its *doubles entendres* with gusto, as if both parties were performers in a stage farce. The lady lets the rapist get away before raising the alarm; her parents' bathetic concern – "Dear Daughter, this must never be, / Z—ds we must go to Law" – is triggered by learning the rapist's rank (Montagu 1993: 216–21). The ballad style and Ovidian-epistle style help shape the two equally and deliberately inaccurate accounts of this event and help define the ideological position (not the poet's own) that goes with each account. To say that Montagu poses as a classical satirist and "inveighed against her contemporaries in scornful tones" is quite inadequate (Kairoff 2003: 188): critical dialogue is urgently needed to get to grips with her complexity and detail.

The two contrasted Griselda Murray poems raise in acute form the issue of Montagu's penchant for ventriloquizing. Yet from her juvenile poems onward she frequently employs a first-person voice which is to all appearances personal, even confessional. Apparently unmediated personal feeling is legible in the single-stanza early poem that begins, " 'Twas folly made mee fondly write / (For what [have] I to doe with Love and wit?)." Poetry has become a transgression to be punished; punishment ensures that "if I Now both burn and blot / (By mee) the[y] cannot bee forgot" (Grundy 1999: 20). The young poet wrote this into her earlier album, adjacent to twenty pages cut out of the book. Its two slips of the pen suggest a pressure of feeling which also informs the rush of monosyllables and occasional metrical irregularity. The author does not explain her crime or trespass: knowing, she need not say. For a reader the inexplicitness suggests immediacy: understanding the emotion, we do not need explanatory detail. This same quality, which casts the reader (like a reader of diaries or private letters) as an eavesdropper, belongs to most of her personal poems.

In using poetry to process emotional experience Montagu remains close to the transgressive young Lady Mary Pierrepont. In "Sing Gentle Maid, reform my Breast"

she writes of an unnamed female singer as an Orpheus: "You can the passions of my soul subdue, / And tame the lions and the tigers there." In the exquisite lyric "Hymn to the Moon" the speaker addresses the source of light which is also Diana, the chaste goddess who once fell in love with a mortal:

> Even thee fair Queen from thy amazing height
> The Charms of young Endimion drew,
> Veil'd with the Mantle of concealing Night,
> With all thy Greatness, and thy Coldness too.

Coldness? In the act of stooping to an unequal assignation? In Montagu's hands even so simple and apparently transparent a poem retains its opacity; her metaphors both resist and require unpacking (Montagu 1993: 286, 300).

Her imagery is unfailingly striking and thought-provoking. A poem of personal despair, "1736, Address'd to —," images life as a muddy road, a burden fit for a packhorse, and a prison without a key. In literary terms the advocacy of suicide which shocked the poem's first readers (equally unacceptable to Montagu's friends Lady Pomfret and Lady Hertford, and to the *London Magazine*, which first printed it) is less outrageous than the making over of images from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and other religious texts into this defiantly unbelieving poem. A late short poem, "Wrote in the Year 1755 at Lovere," similarly revolutionizes Christ's parable of the sower and the seed. Wisdom here is "slow product of experienced Years, / The only Fruit that Life's cold Winter bears!" Liable to be swept away by storms of passion, it demands care in tending as well as a promising soil. But no happy outcome is promised: "No sooner born, than the poor Planter dyes" (Montagu 1993: 290–1, 306–7).

Many factors have worked against Montagu's standing as a poet: her refusal of optimism is probably one of them. I believe there is currently no one eighteenth-century poet so underinvestigated.

See also chs. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"; 8, "Women Poets and Their Writing in Eighteenth-Century Britain"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 27, "Verse Satire"; 31, "The Constructions of Femininity"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics."

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14

James Thomson, *The Seasons*

Christine Gerrard

The Seasons is arguably the most important long poem of the eighteenth century. Expansive in scale, ambitious in scope, it is the one poem written in the century following *Paradise Lost* that can lay genuine claim to epic status. During the first three decades of the eighteenth century admiration for Milton's great epic had become widespread. Addison's *Spectator* essays on *Paradise Lost* had rehabilitated the republican Milton for "polite" audiences, and critical writings by a sequence of Whig authors such as John Dennis and Sir Richard Blackmore had affirmed Milton as the greatest and most sublime of modern poets. Yet serious attempts at the blank verse epic were few and far between. Blackmore's efforts to appropriate Miltonic blank verse for his politicized historical epics such as *Prince Arthur* and *Eliza* were greeted with admiration by some but mockery by many. Pope and Arbuthnot's mock-critical treatise *Peri Bathous; Or the Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1728) represented the culmination of a new trend for the "mock-Miltonic" which teetered on the precarious boundary between sublimity and bathos. The humor of John Philips's influential pastiche *The Splendid Shilling* (first published in 1701) hinged on the application of a faux-Miltonic style to such pedestrian matters as a gaping hole in the poet's trousers:

An horrid Chasm disclose, with Orifice
Wide, Discontinuous; at which the Winds
Eurus and *Auster*, and the dreadful Force
Of *Boreas*, that congeals the *Cronian* Waves,
Tumultuous enter with dire chilling Blasts,
Portending Agues. Thus a well-fraught Ship,
Long sail'd secure, or thro' th'*Ægean* Deep,
Or the *Ionian*, 'till Cruising near
The *Lilybean* Shoar, with hideous Crush
On *Scylla*, or *Charybdis* (dang'rous Rocks)
She strikes rebounding, whence the shatter'd Oak,
So fierce a Shock unable to withstand,

Admits the Sea; in at the gaping Side
The crouding Waves Gush with impetuous Rage,
Resistless, Overwhelming; Horrors seize
The Mariners . . .
(ll. 124–39)

Philips exploits the opportunity to rehearse the Miltonic grand mode without seriously committing himself to it. A quarter of a century later, Thomson reclaimed the Miltonic high ground with the first version of "Winter" (January 1726). Thomson's account of seasonal severity crescendos to a peak in describing a winter storm at sea:

Prone, on th'uncertain Main,
Descends th'Etherial Force, and plows its Waves
With dreadful Rift: from the mid-Deep, appears,
Surge after Surge, the rising, wat'ry, War.
Whitening, the angry Billows rowl immense,
And roar their Terrors, thro' the shuddering Soul
Of feeble Man, amidst their Fury caught.
. . .
And hark! – the length'ning Roar, continuous, runs
Athwart the rifted Main; at once, it bursts,
And piles a thousand Mountains to the Clouds!
Ill fares the bark, the Wretches' last Resort,
That, lost amid the floating Fragments, moors
Beneath the Shelter of an Icy Isle;
While Night o'erwhelms the Sea, and Horror looks
More horrible.
("Winter" [1726], ll. 163–70, 334–41)

Both Philips and Thomson display a fondness for the adjectival sublime – "terrors," "horrid," "horror," "horrible," "dreadful," "immense," "overwhelming." But whereas Philips's poem exploits the gap between low subject matter and high style to satirize poets who generate a sonorous epic "sound" without having the epic conceptions necessary to justify it [*see* ch. 26, "Epic and Mock-Heroic"], Thomson's *The Seasons* is founded on a grand epic conception. In the words of Martin Price, it is a "visionary history without a hero – the hero being Providence working through the forces of Nature" (Price 1964: 357). *The Seasons* is a paean to the wonder, terror, beauty, and unfathomable mystery of the natural world; but it is also a tough theodicy which attempts to "justify the ways of God to men" by arguing for a benevolent deity and a harmonious universe whose order is only rarely visible to suffering mankind. Although *The Seasons* draws heavily on other modes and genres, especially the Virgilian georgic [*see* ch. 29, "The Georgic"], this epic intent was present even in the earliest version of "Winter." Although Thomson had initially expressed diffidence to his friend William Cranstoun about the piece he was writing

("tis ten to one but I drop it when e'er another fancy comes cross") his latent sense of poetic vocation emerges in the poem's Miltonic emphasis on chastity, purity, and election: preconditions for the high calling of the poet (Thomson 1958:17). Just as Milton in the opening lines of *Paradise Lost* had offered himself to the Holy Spirit "that dost prefer / Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure," so Thomson in the opening of "Winter" emphasized his youthful chastity: "Trod the pure, virgin, Snows, my self as pure" ("Winter" [1726], l. 11). In *The Prelude*, that other great appropriation of Miltonic epic, Wordsworth also avowed his purity: "If in my youth I have been pure in heart . . . and have liv'd / With God and Nature communing" (ii. 427–30).

"Winter" may have entered the world as a comparatively short (405-line) poem, but in the second edition, which appeared only three months later, Thomson declared his seriousness and ambition to the world in a justly famous preface. The preface to the April 1726 "Winter" was effectively a "Defense of Poetry" for the 1720s, ringing with the reformist rhetoric which Thomson had imbibed from his friendships with the Whig critic John Dennis and the poet and literary patron Aaron Hill [*see* chs. 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm," and 37, "The Sublime"]. Thomson voiced his impatience with the "little, glittering Prettinesses; mixed Turns of Wit" that he thought characterized Augustan social verse, and demanded that Poetry "be restored to her antient Truth, and Purity." He wanted poetry to exchange its trivial subject matter for subjects that were "fair, useful, and magnificent," and anticipated a time when poets would once again become "the Delight and Wonder, of Mankind." Thomson's conception of the poet drew on the twin roles of priest-prophet and legislator, images derived from Milton and from the biblical prophets, who were at this time being hailed as poets in their own right. Thomson's self-declared poetic legacy runs from "*Moses* down to *Milton*." Yet although the early "Winter" is a devotional poem that accords with the vogue for the mode of religious sublime championed by Dennis and by Hill and his circle, Thomson declares, unusually, that his central subject will be "the *Works of Nature*." "Where can we meet with such Variety, such Beauty, such Magnificence? All that enlarges, and transports, the Soul" (Thomson 1981: 303–7). This declaration in itself marks a radical departure from contemporary poetry that described the works of nature, often from a scientific perspective, to illustrate God's divine power. It is primarily as a poem about Nature that *The Seasons* won its enduring popularity.

By the time Thomson published "Summer" the following year (1727), he had already begun to incorporate into his poem a wider range of subjects and elements: interpolated narratives, set descriptive "prospect" pieces, geographical excursions to torrid zones, scientific analysis, and political and social comment. This very eclecticism, an eclecticism shared by other long eighteenth-century poems inspired by Virgil's *Georgics*, is intrinsic to an appreciation of *The Seasons*' complex and multifocal vision. But the original January 1726 "Winter," which confines itself almost entirely to native landscapes and is essentially descriptive and meditative in character, has an independent literary significance which merits recognition.

Over the past twenty years, anthologies of and critical works on early eighteenth-century poetry have qualified traditional conceptions of a dominant "Augustan" mode concerned primarily with social manners and mores, politics and the town. Charles Peake's influential anthology *Poetry of Landscape and of the Night* (1967) introduced many students of the 1970s and early 1980s (including the present author) to a different kind of eighteenth-century poetic – meditative, descriptive, melancholic, and subjective. Poems such as Anne Finch's "A Nocturnal Rêverie" (1713), Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" (1717), Parnell's "A Night-Piece on Death" (1722), or Aaron Hill's "Whitehall Stairs" (1721) differ markedly from the public spaces and "nature methodised" of the Tory-inspired loco-descriptive tradition exemplified by Sir John Denham's *Cooper's Hill*, Waller's *St James's Park*, and Pope's *Windsor-Forest*. David Fairer has recently defined this as a distinctive "romantic" mode characteristic of the period 1700–30, influenced in part by Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In such poems the self-aware subject dissolves the boundaries between the outer and the inner worlds and the landscape registers an intense subjectivity (Fairer 2003: 102–21). The earliest version of "Winter" embodies this "romantic" mode. In a letter to Cranstoun written while composing the poem, Thomson imagines his friend in the poetic landscape, "seized with a fine romantic kind of a melancholy . . . wandering philosophical, and pensive, amidst the brown, wither'd groves" (Thomson 1958: 17). There are echoes throughout "Winter" of Milton's "Il Penseroso." Landscape mirrors states of mind – the chiasmus of "trod the pure, virgin, Snows myself as pure" is almost an extension of Marvell's "green thought in a green shade." The circling motions of the wasps around the poet's head, their departure and return, function as a half-formed metaphor for the poet's thoughts in contemplation of the landscape, circling and finally ascending hesitatingly to loftier heights of poetic rapture along with the wheeling and departing woodcocks.

> . . . the well-poised *Hornet*, hovering, hangs,
> With quivering Pinions, in the genial Blaze;
> Flys off, in airy Circles: then returns,
> And hums, and dances, to the beating Ray:
> Nor shall the Man, that, musing, walks alone,
> And, heedless, strays within his radiant Lists,
> Go unchastis'd away.
> . . .
> Then list'ning *Hares* forsake the rusling Woods
> And, starting at the frequent Noise, escape
> To the rough Stubble, and the rushy Fen.
> Then *Woodcocks*, o'er the fluctuating Main,
> That glimmers to the Glimpses of the Moon,
> Stretch their long Voyage to the woodland Glade:
> Where, wheeling with uncertain Flight, they mock
> The nimble *Fowler*'s aim.
> ("Winter" [1726], ll. 23–9, 50–7)

There is a delicacy and fluidity in Thomson's evocation of mood and movement which recall Finch's "Nocturnal Rêverie." Yet even in this early version Thomson, a former student and instructor of natural philosophy (what we would call science) at Edinburgh University, saw nature not merely as a mirror of mind, but as a world charged with the mystery and grandeur of objectively registered scientific process. Thomson includes a description of autumnal fogs, illustrating how the sun's rays "draw" vapor which is then condensed by the coolness of the evening:

> . . . humid *Evening*, gliding o'er the Sky,
> In her chill Progress, checks the straggling Beams,
> And robs them of their gather'd, vapoury, Prey,
> Where Marches stagnate, and where Rivers wind,
> Cluster the rolling *Fogs*, and swim along
> The dusky-mantled Lawn: then slow descend,
> Once more to mingle with their *Watry Friends*.
> ("Winter" [1726], ll. 81–7)

Yet the description is not prosaic. The italicized "*Evening*," "*Fogs*," and "*Watry Friends*" suggest animation, if not personification – with an effect different from that of the more conventional Augustan personifications subsequently used by Thomson, such as "The Power of Cultivation" and "Industry." Verbs such as "straggling" and "swim" imply a process carried out in the realms of animal life: "humid *Evening*" becomes a maternal figure who "checks" or controls her "straggling" brood and taken from them the "Prey" they have picked up on their wanderings.

As *The Seasons* expanded it became a far more overtly scientific poem. Thomson was profoundly influenced by Isaac Newton's discoveries, particularly the *Principia* (1687), which explained the gravitational pull on planets and comets, and the *Opticks* (1704), with its explanation of the behavior and content of light. The *Principia* supplied the world and the universe with an organizing principle: the laws of gravity permeated both the microscopically small and the unfathomably immense. Thomson's "To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton" (1727) hailed Newton as a hero, and in "Summer" the same year he included an account of Newton's theories of gravitation and projection, the description of the refraction of light from the *Opticks*, descriptions of the aurora borealis, and praise of the great scientific figures Newton, Boyle, and Bacon. For Thomson, knowledge of the physical laws that created the optical effect of the rainbow made it more, not less, beautiful.

Thomson's interest in science extended beyond astronomy and physics into "earth sciences" such as botany, geology, and mineralogy. The "world beneath the world" fascinated him – the origins of gemstones, the structure of caves and mountains, the sources of rivers. In 1730 he added a remarkable passage to "Autumn" on theories of percolation and the origins of rivers (a hard subject for a poetic *tour de force*) which conveys the author's excitement with geological process (Spacks 1967: 34–5). Thomson shares his fascination in science with other scientific poets of the period, collectively sometimes known as "physico-theological poets." Poems such as

John Reynolds's *Death's Vision* (1709), Blackmore's *Creation* (1712), Richard Collins's *Nature Display'd* (1727), and Brooke's *Universal Beauty* (1735) extolled the wonders of God's natural world and man's intellectual superiority (epitomized by Newton) in finding the key to God's wisdom. Yet Thomson differs from these poets in significant ways. Whereas Brooke, Collins, and Blackmore exalt Nature as a "grand machine," and God as a "great master mechanic," Thomson rarely conceptualizes nature in mechanistic terms, in 1744 finally deleting *The Seasons*' single reference to the universe as a "vast Machine" (Thomson 1981: 61). Thomson would almost certainly have appreciated Pope's ridicule in *Peri Bathous* of Blackmore's attribution to the deity of the metaphoric roles of divine weaver, architect, and builder (Gerrard 2005: 218–19). Whereas John Reynolds locates the mysteries of precipitation in "Heaven's shops . . . and workhouses," with their "tight mills," "cool alembic," "lathe," and "loom," Thomson as a scientific writer reveals a world silently animate with the subtle mystery of creation. Nothing in *The Seasons* is static. Every natural process, from a summer storm to the creation of frost to the making of rivers, is depicted as a tension, charged with energy, between competing elements. Patricia Spacks's masterly account of the frost passage in "Winter," ll. 714–59, "What art thou Frost?," shows how it hinges on the conflict between the "energy which produces stasis and that which maintains motion" (Spacks 1967: 39). The process of freezing is dramatized as a struggle between the flowing water and the force that seeks to capture it, the frost which "arrests the bickering Stream" until, "seiz'd from Shore to Shore, / The whole imprison'd River growls below." The tension is created by Thomson's use of dynamic verbs – "seiz'd," "growls," "arrests," "shakes."

Thomson alone among the physico-theological poets manages to convey the excitement of science and the exuberance of the natural world. We can almost hear the hushed, rhapsodic tones of a David Bellamy in Thomson's account of the botanist in search of his prize:

> Then spring the living Herbs, profusely wild,
> O'er all the deep-green Earth, beyond the Power
> Of Botanist to number up their Tribes:
> Whether he steals along the lonely Dale,
> In silent Search; or thro' the Forest, rank
> With what the dull Incurious Weeds account,
> Bursts his blind Way; or climbs the Mountain-Rock,
> Fir'd by the nodding Verdure of its Brow.
> ("Spring," ll. 222–9)

"Fir'd" captures the sense of excitement; the alliterative "Bursts his blind Way" the sheer impenetrability of the natural world. No matter how hard man searches, nature's plenitude and variety will always overwhelm the human intellectual desire to collect, categorize, and classify. And it is this sense of plenitude, of nature pressing almost unbearably on the senses, which characterizes Thomson's treatment of the natural world in *The Seasons*. In "Spring" the catalogue of spring flowers, beautifully individuated

by texture and hue ("The yellow Wall-Flower, stain'd with iron Brown," "Auriculas, enrich'd / With shining Meal o'er all their velvet Leaves") piles up into a crescendo of colors and shapes that "*break* / On the charm'd Eye" (the italicized "*break*" seems epiphanic). There are "Infinite Numbers, Delicacies, Smells, / With Hues on Hues Expression cannot paint, / The Breath of Nature and her endless Bloom" ("Spring," ll. 553–5). In a passage in "Summer" (ll. 287–317) influenced by Fontenelle's theory of the plurality of worlds via *Spectator*, no. 519 – the innumerable microscopic worlds that might exist within the "blue" or "sheen" of a plum – Thomson uncharacteristically depicts the limitations of man's senses as a blessing in disguise. Could man see the "Millions of unseen People" and "nameless Nations" hovering round his porridge bowl, he would "abhorrent turn; and in dead Night, / When Silence sleeps o'er all, be stun'd with Noise." There is more going on in nature than can ever meet the eye, be heard by the ear, or declared by the tongue. Thomson more frequently sees the limitations of the receptive and expressive powers of man as a source of frustration. Words fail as Thomson resorts to synaesthesia to express the inexpressible.

> Ah what shall Language do? Ah where find Words
> Ting'd with so many Colours; and whose Power,
> To Life approaching, may perfume my Lays
> With that fine Oil, those aromatic Gales
> That inexhaustive flow continual round?
> ("Spring," ll. 475–9)

Often Thomson invites us to "see" things that are not visible to the naked eye, processes either microscopic or concealed. "See, where the winding Vale its lavish Stores, / Irriguous, spreads. See, how the Lily drinks / The latent Rill, scare oozing thro' the Grass" ("Spring," ll. 494–6). Or how each "attractive Plant . . . sucks, and swells / The juicy Tide; a twining Mass of Tubes." For all its limitations, however, language has the potential for precision and exactitude: Thomson's Latinate words such as "detruded" and "irriguous" are drawn, as Sambrook notes, from the regular, exact vocabulary of scientific writing (Thomson 1981: xxi). Words used metaphorically even in Thomson's time, such as "attractive," "latent," and "lucid," have for Thomson a precise scientific meaning. Nor is Thomson afraid of being deliberately "unpoetic" – the "twining Mass of Tubes" as a description of plant stems is strikingly unconventional.

The isolated botanist who "Bursts his blind Way" through the forest is mirrored in numerous other (less scientific) human figures overshadowed by nature's immensity. Despite *The Seasons*' indebtedness to Virgil's *Georgics*, with its emphasis on an earth which welcomes human interaction in a symbiosis of nature and nurture, Thomson's *The Seasons* shares something of the arch-atheist Lucretius' sense in *De Rerum Natura* of nature's formidable violence and unpredictability. All too often Thomson's man on the landscape looks like a tiny Lilliputian perched precariously on the bosom of an indifferent if not downright hostile Gulliver (Swift, like Thomson, was influenced by

the challenges to perspective offered by both telescope and microscope). Admittedly, Thomson at times shares the optimism of the physico-theological poets in exalting both the discoveries of Newtonian science and man's capacity to understand the operations of the world that surrounds him. "Man superior walks / Amid the glad Creation, musing Praise, / And looking lively Gratitude" ("Spring," ll. 170–1). Yet Thomson (unlike Brooke and Blackmore) is drawn almost obsessively to apocalyptic scenes of natural devastation that sweep away the works of men as if they themselves were "but the Beings of a Summer's Day" ("Spring," l. 61). Just as the "quivering Nations" [insects] sport in the sun until "Fierce Winter sweeps them from the Face of Day," so too mankind flutters on "From Toy to Toy, from Vanity to Vice; / Till, blown away by Death, Oblivion comes / Behind, and strikes them from the Book of Life" ("Summer," ll. 342–51). There is a biblical cadence to this familiar conceit, a recollection of *vanitatis mundi* which betrays the origins of the original "Winter" in the religious sublime movement championed by Dennis, Hill, Young, and Mallet (Thomson's immediate literary friends) as well as an earlier generation of devotional poets such as Isaac Watts [*see* ch. 4, "Poetry and Religion"]. Biblical paraphrases, particularly of the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Job, were popular, and it is no accident that Thomson's early preface to "Winter" exalts the Book of Job as "that noble, and antient, *Poem*, which, even, strikes so forcibly thro' a mangling Translation, [and] is crowned with a Description of the grand *Works of Nature*" (Thomson 1981: 305). In the second edition of "Winter" Thomson added one of the age's favorite instances of Old Testament sublimity from Psalm 104, the image of God walking on the wings of the wind – a passage that had previously influenced Addison's Whig heroic poem *The Campaign* [see ch. 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics"]. In the first version of "Spring" Thomson had included a description of the Deluge as a punishment for man's sin, and a paean to a thunderbolt-throwing Old Testament-style Jehovah who "takes the solid Earth, / And rocks the Nations," as well as an account of an atheist seeking shelter in a cave from God's wrath until "entering just the Cave, / *The Messenger of Justice* glancing, comes, / With swifter sweep. Behind, and trips his Heel" (Thomson 1981: 291).

However, as *The Seasons* evolved Thomson gradually removed the sense of divine agency behind such cataclysmic events as storms, deluges, and typhoons, while at the same time increasing their prominence within his poem. In this tendency he was reflecting the growing eighteenth-century interest in the sublime as a secular aesthetic rather than as a spur to religious devotion. Mankind's attempt to grasp that which is too vast and too painful to comprehend causes the *frisson* of pleasure which Thomson defines in an early letter to David Mallet on the sandstorm scene in Mallet's geological apocalyptic poem *The Excursion*. "I am not only chill'd, but shiver at the Sight" (Thomson 1958: 49). The effect of such overwhelming scenes of human suffering in the face of apparently random acts of destruction is complex. Tim Fulford has persuasively argued that such passages, embodying what Shaun Irlam in this volume usefully calls "the sacrificial sublime" [*see* ch. 37, "The Sublime"], always focus on victims of lower social status – unindividuated "swains," the poor and innocent (Fulford 1996:

22–8). As Jennifer Keith shows (ch. 9, "POETRY, SENTIMENT, AND SENSIBILITY"), part of what has been seen to corrupt the literature of sensibility is the way it directs the reader to gaze upon, and therefore objectify, the sufferer: a "theatrics of virtue" which invites readers to participate covertly in a submerged sadism. The famous scene in "Winter" of the shepherd lost in the snowstorm shows Thomson exploiting the subject for maximum pathos:

> In vain for him th'officious Wife prepares
> The Fire fair-blazing and the Vestment warm;
> In vain his little Children, peeping out
> Into the mingling Storm, demand their Sire,
> With Tears of artless Innocence. Alas!
> Nor Wife, nor Children, more shall he behold,
> Nor Friends, nor sacred Home.
>
> (ll. 311–17)

The passage stirs the emotions of pity and pathos: powerful feeling displaces the need to act, and thus, argues Fulford, "No specific remedies for the rural poverty that made shepherds more vulnerable to natural disaster than gentlemen are offered" (Fulford 1996: 25). As such, passages like those describing the snowstorm or the lightning bolt – which inexplicably strikes not the rich and powerful in their country houses but the rural laborers out in the fields gathering the harvest – reinforce the class hierarchies of Thomson's vision of Britain.

The episode of Celadon and Amelia in "Summer" (ll. 1169–1222) is obviously modeled on the story of the two rustic lovers John Hewit and Sarah Drew, struck dead at Stanton Harcourt in July 1718, an episode which Pope himself had already commemorated in an unusually (for him) sentimental epitaph of that year. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's tart response to such literary sentimentalizing ("Now they are happy in their Doom / For P. has wrote upon their Tomb") exposes the self-serving nature of such representations of rural suffering (Montagu 1977: 216). Yet Thomson's "victims" are not merely poor shepherds or ignorant rustics. All those whose occupations expose them to the forces of nature – this includes sailors, explorers, scientists, and merchants – become vulnerable to such devastation. Rather than enabling the reader to enjoy a comfortable displacement of responsibility, such scenes in fact remain disturbing and inexplicable, reminders of a world in which the "SMILING GOD" ("Spring," l. 862) is rarely present, perhaps even a *deus absconditus*. If Thomson's *The Seasons* belongs to a tradition of theological poems arguing for the presence of a providential deity, then it would be hard to imagine a poet who so insistently presses the question which perplexes even the best of Christians: "Why does God allow the innocent to suffer?" In this respect *The Seasons* speaks in a curiously modern way to a twenty-first-century audience whose access to global media coverage exposes them to the tragic consequences of natural disasters such as the tsunami of December 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. Thomson's "Nature," indifferent to its victims, is unpredictable and terrifying. If Thomson objectifies its victims, it is in their final

transformation at the end of such passages into mute monuments, silently asking the endless question "Why?"

> But who can paint the Lover, as he stood,
> Pierc'd by severe Amazement, hating Life,
> Speechless, and fix'd in all the Death of Woe!
> So, faint Resemblance, on the Marble-Tomb,
> The well-dissembled Mourner stooping stands,
> For ever silent and for ever sad.
> ("Summer," ll. 1217–22)

Similarly "frozen" or marmoreal figures recur throughout *The Seasons* – the inhabitants of a north African city petrified by a sandstorm, the pilot frozen to the helm, the "blank Assistants" in "sad Presage" on the plague ship in "Summer" – testament to Thomson's concern with emblems and memorials of human suffering.

The rural subjects represented in *The Seasons* were far from accusing Thomson of social quietism and moral complacency. Coleridge famously proclaimed "true fame" for Thomson on finding a copy of *The Seasons* in a remote rural cottage; and, as John Strachan shows, it was to poets in the "self-taught" tradition, such as John Clare and Robert Bloomfield, that Thomson spoke uniquely (Strachan 2000). The enduring popularity of *The Seasons* among literate rural people derived in large part from his representations of the hardships and pleasures of their lives. Thomson's social connections during the 1730s with the "cousinhood" – the aristocratic Whig family of the Cobhams and Lytteltons (George Lyttelton was his patron) may have placed him in contact with a wealthy governing elite. Yet this did not permit complacency. During the 1730s the Cobhams and the Lytteltons were themselves out of office, vocal opponents of the Walpole administration. If Thomson's eulogistic paean to George Lyttelton and his wife Lucy at home in the paradisal gardens of Hagley Hall ("Spring," ll. 904–62) smacks of a *Country Life* feature, Thomson nevertheless praises Lyttelton for his crusading mission, planning with "honest Zeal unwarped by Party-Rage, / Britannia's Weal; how from the venal Gulph / To raise her Virtue, and her Arts revive." Thomson's Whiggism was reformist as well as oppositional in nature. In "Winter" (ll. 359–88) he praises the work of the Jail Committee, appointed in 1729 to investigate allegations of torture in English prisons. The committee was composed primarily of members of the opposition to Walpole, and it is to this "Patriot" cause that Thomson committed himself for the majority of his literary career (Gerrard 1994). Appearing on the literary scene in London in the mid-1720s, just as the opposition to Walpole was beginning to emerge as an active threat to the ministry, Thomson threw his energies into this campaign: *Britannia* of 1729 was his first outspoken condemnation of Walpole's pacific foreign policy. Other subsequent works, such as *Liberty* (1735–6), the Patriot drama *Edward and Eleanora* (the first play to be banned by Walpole's Stage Licensing Act of 1737), and *Alfred* (1740) with its famous lyric "Rule Britannia," share with *The Seasons* a sense of patriotism under threat. James Thomson

as an "Anglo-Scot" joked to his fellow Scot David Mallet in the summer of 1726 (while composing "Summer") that his new drafts "contain a Panegyric on Brittain, which may perhaps contribute to make my Poem popular. The English People are not a little vain of Themselves, and their Country. Brittania too includes our native Country, Scotland" (Thomson 1958: 48). While other Scots felt less comfortable at submerging their sense of national identity within Hanoverian Britain after the Act of Union [*see* ch. 41, "POETRY BEYOND THE ENGLISH BORDERS"], Thomson as a lowland Scot seems to have embraced this sense of British patriotism fully (Carruthers 2000).

The Seasons, oscillating between an optimistic vision of Britain crowned by London – the world center of commerce, industry, arts, and empire – and a pessimistic view of Britain as a nation in terminal decline captures as well as any oppositional poem of the 1730s the tensions and ambivalence inherent in most poets' view of Walpole's Britain. Only paid poets of the administration (and this included Thomson's friend Edward Young) could offer a confidently untroubled view of Britain's greatness. Such contradictions emerge most clearly in the final vision of Thomson's *Liberty*, where the goddess warns of imminent collapse unless Britons remains politically vigilant, ready to safeguard their ancient tradition of freedom. Within the looser fabric of *The Seasons* such moments of confident affirmation or of pessimistic prophecy remain disconnected, unqualified by the preceding passages, giving the poem at times a curiously self-contradictory, almost schizophrenic feeling. Hence lines 43–150 of "Autumn" contain an unqualified paean to Industry, claiming that the nurturing powers of work and civilization lead to the city, "Nurse of Arts," and that apotheosis of political liberty, the British parliaments: yet "Autumn" lines 1277 onwards beats a retreat from the corruptions of city life, with its fraud and rapacity (including the spoils of trade and colonial conquest), and extols instead the simple country life.

As Thomson expanded the poem over the course of a literary lifetime, he incorporated increasingly diverse material which lent itself to such contrasts. Yet the poem's internal contradictions are too obvious to be accidental. They reflect the essentially self-contradictory nature of the world in which the adult Thomson lived. While one shepherd is starving in the snow, another is enjoying a cosy evening by the fireside with his friends and family. While one nation rises to fame and prosperity, another declines into decadence, corruption, and eventual poverty. The tonal range of the poem is similarly varied: it incorporates moments of Miltonic high seriousness and lofty vision, moments of mock-heroic ("Autumn"'s witty portrait of drunken rural squires recalls Thomson's youthful mock-Miltonic lines on venereal disease), public panegyric, private meditation, closely observed natural description, and exotic travelogue. *The Seasons* is a work of enormous energy and exuberance, and its capaciousness is a hallmark of the eighteenth-century long poem. William Wordsworth, himself profoundly inspired by Thomson, found it hard to reconcile Thomson's undisputed greatness with his equally undisputed popularity. Thomson reached out to a wider audience than any of his poetic contemporaries: unlike Pope's satires of the 1730s, *The Seasons* did not require detailed knowledge of London political life, its personalities and its disputes. Though twenty-first-century readers may prefer the wry ironies of a

Pope, Swift, or Montagu, or the more nuanced rural scenes of Anne Finch or Thomas Gray, it is no accident that *The Seasons* remained the most widely read and widely sold poem of the eighteenth century.

See also chs. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"; 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"; 3, "Poetry and Science"; 4, "Poetry and Religion"; 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"; 6, "Poetry and the Visual Arts"; 29, "The Georgic"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics"; 37, "The Sublime."

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15
Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, and Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*

John Goodridge

The Thresher's Labour (1730) and *The Woman's Labour* (1739) form such a self-evidently interesting and accessible pair of poems for comparative study that in recent years they have become a familiar double-act in eighteenth-century studies, both as a topic in undergraduate courses and as an element in the scholarly recovery of a self-taught, laboring-class tradition in eighteenth-century poetry. Stephen Duck's poem had often been touched on by literary historians as an eighteenth-century curiosity, as had his rags-to-riches though ultimately tragic life story, which was the subject of a respectable academic biography (Davis 1926). Mary Collier's poem, reprinted in the 1760s and the 1820s, was again rediscovered in the wake of 1960s feminism. The two poems were yoked together in two editions in the 1980s (Ferguson 1985; Thompson and Sugden 1989: the latter is quoted in the present essay), and they have been discussed in comparative terms ever since.

There are good reasons for this. The debate on women's work in which the two poets engage, Duck's seeming desire literally to silence women workers and Collier's resistance to this, and the documentary accounts of laboring lives that both poems offer, are invaluable to anyone interested in the period. At the same time, although there had been earlier laboring-class verses, these two poems seem to signal the arrival of a recognizable new literary phenomenon, the so-called "peasant poet," often writing about his or her own life of labor. If the two poems are read alongside contextualizing materials, such as Joseph Spence's contemporary account of Duck or Mary Collier's brief autobiography of 1762, they offer intriguing insights into the workings of literary patronage and the struggle for publication in the eighteenth century. The poems seem perfectly pitched to cater to our modern interest in class and gender as topics for literary-historical contemplation.

But this apparently exemplary pairing of texts in the new canon is not entirely without pitfalls. For one thing, it may give the false impression that Collier's is the only, or the only significant, response to Duck's poem. In fact, a number of other poems addressed to Duck were published in the 1730s, some drawing on the

conventions established by *The Thresher's Labour*. A good example is Robert Tatersal's "The Bricklayers Labours," published in 1734. Tatersal was memorably described by Rayner Unwin in his 1954 history of the English "peasant poets" as having had the approach of a "cynical and unsuccessful racketeer," muscling in on Duck's success, but this seems grossly unfair. Tatersal's poem actually offers an interesting and rare insight into a working life, and is by no means contemptible as verse. "The Bricklayers Labours" is the only first-hand account I have found of an eighteenth-century building site, and for this reason alone is uniquely valuable. Tatersal describes a noisy, gin-fueled hell-hole, easily a match for Duck's dusty threshing barn or Collier's washday back kitchen. (He also, like Mary Collier, captures well the chilly uncertainties of winter work.) The poem is as rich in descriptive detail as Duck's or Collier's, as we see in this passage, where Tatersal describes setting off for work at six o'clock in the morning:

> With Sheep-skin Apron girt about my Waste,
> Down Stairs I go to visit my Repast;
> Which rarely doth consist of more than these,
> A Quartern Loaf, and half a Pound of Cheese;
> Then in a Linnen Bag, on purpose made,
> My Day's Allowance o're my Shoulder's laid:
> And first, to keep the Fog from coming in,
> I whet my Whistle with a Dram of Gin;
> So thus equip'd, my Trowel in my Hand,
> I haste to Work, and join the ragged Band:
> And now each one his different Post assign'd,
> And three to three in Ranks compleatly join'd;
> When Bricks and Mortar eccho's from on high,
> Mortar and Bricks, the common, constant Cry;
> Each sturdy Slave their different Labours share,
> Some Brickmen call'd, and some for Mortar are:
> With sultry Sweat and blow without Allay,
> Travel the Standard up and down all Day.
> (Tatersal, "The Bricklayers Labours," ll. 13–30)

This is fascinating both from a social-historical perspective, for the detail it offers, and in terms of its overarching literary trope. What seems to be going on here in literary terms is the preparation for an epic battle, as the bricklayer puts on his protective battledress of a sheepskin apron, fortifies himself with gin, and arms himself with a trowel. This last is an effective weapon, as Tatersal has already reminded us in a poem placed earlier in the volume, which imagines a mock battle between his trowel and Stephen Duck's threshing flail:

> A *Flail*, a *Trowel*, Weapons very good,
> If fitly us'd and rightly understood;

But close engag'd, beware the *useless Flail*;
The *Trowel* then can terribly prevail.
("To Stephen Duck,
The *famous* Threshing Poet," ll. 23–6)

On the building site Tatersal's "Ranks" form up in threes, like a parading army. Even the "Standard" – the hoist that lifts the bricks and mortar – might offer the military image of a "standard" flag raised aloft. If the publication of *The Thresher's Labour* had given license to individuals like Tatersal to offer close verse-descriptions of their work, it had also, following Duck's innovative reversal of certain pastoral expectations, encouraged them to be bold in their use of poetic genres and techniques.

Tatersal's mock-epic "ragged" band of laborers was no doubt inspired by Duck's corn-reapers who, armed with scythes, "Strain ev'ry Nerve, and Blow for Blow we give. / All strive to vanquish, tho' the Victor gains / No other Glory, but the greatest Pains" (*The Thresher's Labour*, ll. 117–19). He responds to Duck's mock-heroic representation of fieldwork with a similar view from the building site, and a friendly challenge to a laboring-class poets' "flyting" match, to be fought as a duel using the tools of their trades. The footman and former apprentice weaver Robert Dodsley, by contrast, shrewdly aligns himself in his "Epistle to Stephen Duck" as a fellow fledgling-poet, "just naked from the Shell" (l. 112). Together he and Duck will "Hop round the basis of *Parnassus' Hill*" (l. 115); and there is an interesting echo of *The Thresher's Labour*:

The tim'rous Young, just ventur'd from the Nest,
First in low Bushes hop, and often rest;
From Twig to Twig their tender Wings they try,
Yet only flutter when they seem to fly.
(ll. 102–5, in *A Muse in Livery: or, the Footman's Miscellany*, 1732)

The phrase "Twig to Twig" comes from Duck's notorious simile comparing chattering women workers with a flock of sparrows:

Thus have I seen on a bright Summer's Day,
On some green Brake a Flock of Sparrows play;
From Twig to Twig, from Bush to Bush they fly,
And with continu'd Chirping fill the Sky
(ll. 192–5, in *Poems on Several Subjects*, 1730)

We shall see that Mary Collier engages with this passage from Duck on two occasions. While hers is undoubtedly the boldest of the group of poems by laboring-class poets who emerged in the 1730s, it should be seen in the context of these other responses to Duck.

Reading Duck and Collier in isolation from their contemporaries may also lead to oversimplified or reductive readings of the two texts, particularly as regards the

debate over women workers embodied in them. Both poems are generally understood to be documentary – indeed, the more "literary" Duck becomes, the more blame he seems to have received from modern critics, for supposed inauthenticity. But without a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the two poets engage with literary materials, and of the expectations associated with labor poetry in the early eighteenth century, much depth of field is lost. Duck's swipe at women workers for talking too much and working too little, for example, is read as being straightforwardly and perhaps predictably chauvinistic; Mary Collier's angry response is correspondingly seen as setting things aright. But the truth is both more complex and more interesting than this. Duck's anti-feminist statement emerges from his sense of a need for literary embellishment – poetic techniques and precedents that could be adapted to describe his own world. This is a sense he shared with many of the other laboring-class poets of the period, including Collier. What was the correct model for describing one's daily labors, a topic that had never received credible first-hand treatment before? Just as Tatersal would look to military epic and mock-heroic styles to describe his building site, so Duck had looked to classical georgic and epic forms, and to Milton. On the morning of the second day of the hay harvest, in Duck's poem, the "Master" arrives with a group of working women, "arm'd with Rake and Prong" (l. 164) to turn the hay. The poet's theme throughout his description of them is their talk, which he derisively describes as "prattling," "confus'd," "tattling," and so on. He wishes that "their Hands" were "as active as their Tongues" (l. 169), says that they sit around talking when their meal break is finished, and affects to be baffled by the fact that they all seem to talk at once and so cannot be understood by bystanders. At length he silences them, by directing a shower of rain on to the field, at which "Their noisy Prattle all at once is done, / And to the Hedge they all for Shelter run" (ll. 189–90).

At this point the modern reader may turn to Mary Collier's "reply" (conveniently printed a few pages away in the recent editions), and take solace in her refusal to be so silenced:

> But if you'd have what you have wrote believ'd,
> I find that you to hear us talk are griev'd.
> In this, I hope, you do not speak your mind,
> For none but *Turks*, that I could ever find,
> Have Mutes to serve them, or did e'er deny
> Their Slaves, at Work, to chat it merrily.
> Since you have Liberty to speak your mind,
> And are to talk, as well as we, inclin'd,
> Why should you thus repine, because that we,
> Like you, enjoy that pleasing Liberty?
> What! would you Lord it quite, and take away
> The only Privilege our Sex enjoy?
> (Collier, *The Woman's Labour*, ll. 63–74)

This is a spirited and effective response, with its rhetorical gesturing to English "Liberty" in chauvinistic contrast to the supposedly unenlightened and tyrannical "*Turks*," and its sardonic appeal for kinder treatment of the "Slaves" that modern women have become. But if we read on in the Duck poem, we can see that his silencing of the women field-workers has its own rhetorical momentum: it leads directly into what is clearly a carefully planned mock-epic simile, in the passage about the sparrows:

> Thus have I seen on a bright Summer's day,
> On some green brake a Flock of Sparrows play.
> From twig to twig, from bush to bush they fly,
> And with continu'd chirping fill the Sky,
> But on a sudden, if a Storm appears,
> Their chirping noise no longer dins your ears;
> They fly for shelter to the thickest bush,
> Their silent sit, and all at once is hush.
> (*The Thresher's Labour*, ll. 191–8)

Here we see the real purpose of the exercise: a piece of natural observation about the birds falling silent in the rain has prompted Duck to try his hand at an extended simile, the result no doubt of his nights spent reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Edward Bysshe's compendium of extracts, *The Art of English Poetry* (1702), and Addison's *Spectator*. The latter would have reassured him that "the Ancients," in their similes, "provided there was a likeness . . . did not much trouble themselves about the decency of the comparison" (no. 160, September 3, 1711). Mary Collier's comment that "on our abject State you throw your Scorn, / And Women wrong, your Verses to adorn" (ll. 41–2) recognizes that a primary purpose of Duck's scene of women in the hayfield is stylistic. He is concerned with working two familiar literary devices into the scene: an epic or mock-epic simile, and a thunderstorm, the latter a familiar georgic device. He is economical with his imagery, and so he gives his resentment of the women's talking a threefold literary purpose: as an element of his anti-pastoral machinery, as the occasion for the thunderstorm which will silence them, and as the focus for his epic simile. Collier's anger at Duck is thus accurately focused on the "Scorn" implicit in his making literary capital out of his unjust views of women's social and working practices.

The two poems exist, then, not only in an intense intertextual dialogue, offering competing but overlapping views of labor, but also as important elements in a broader dialogue about poetry and labor, in an emerging tradition of laboring-class poetry. This tradition arose both from the literary aspirations of laboring-class writers and from the literary and social conditions of the time. Stephen Duck was the product of a dame-school education, supplemented by a small store of books supplied by a friend who worked in London. Although he had begun to write poetry spontaneously, *The Thresher's Labour* was actually the product of a specific suggestion by his first patron, the local clergyman Mr. Stanley, and from Stanley's wife, that he write a poem "on his

own situation." Mary Collier, taught to read and write by her impoverished parents until, as she says, "my Mother dying, I lost my Education," was fired up by reading Duck's poems, which she says she "soon got by heart" (1762, pp. [iii], iv). Her brief autobiography also suggests that *The Woman's Labour* may have been composed mentally and written down later. Certainly, feats of mental composition and poetic memorizing are common among the laboring-class poets in this period. (Robert Bloomfield, for example, composed the 1,500 lines of *The Farmer's Boy* [1800] in his head.) They testify to the lack of access to writing and reading materials, and the resourcefulness of the laboring-class poets in their determination to force an entry into literary culture. To write about one's "own situation" was a natural starting point for both poets, though we can see that, in different ways for Duck and Collier, neither poem was driven purely by a desire for autobiographical self-expression. *The Thresher's Labour* was commissioned, or at least encouraged and suggested by a patron; *The Woman's Labour* came out of a literary response, and a desire to put right a factual wrong, as Collier explains in the autobiographical "Remarks of the Author's Life" which preface the 1762 edition of her works. When she was a washerwoman in Petersfield, "Duck's Poems came abroad, which I soon got by heart, fancying he had been too Severe on the Female Sex in his Thresher's Labour brought me to a Strong propensity to call an Army of Amazons to vindicate the injured Sex: Therefore I answer'd him to please my own humour" (1762: iv).

Like Duck and Tatersal, Mary Collier has her "Army," though unlike the male poets she invokes the spirit of classical heroism not to do the work, but to give strength to her response to Duck. It is an intense, satirical, literary response, and Collier's recognition of the literariness of this poetical exchange of views is a constant in her response to him, from her wonderfully facetious mock-panegyric opening address to him in *The Woman's Labour* as "great Duck" ("Immortal Bard! thou fav'rite of the Nine!") to the clever *homage* to his style that concludes the moving "Elegy" she wrote on hearing of his death by drowning, many years later:

> The want of wit thy pleasure turn'd to pain,
> Thy Life a Burthen, and thy Death a Stain:
> So have I Seen in a fair Summers Morn,
> Bright Phœbus's Beams the Hills and Dales adorn,
> With Flow'rs and Shrubs their fragrant Sweets display,
> And Warbling Birds foretell a Chearfull Day:
> When on a Sudden some dark Clouds arise,
> Obscures the Sun and overspreads the Skies;
> The Birds are Silent, plants contract their bloom,
> The Glorious Day ends in a dismal gloom.
>
> (Collier, "Elegy upon
> Stephen Duck" [pub. 1762], ll. 25–34)

In this somberly ironic reprise to her "flyting" of Duck in *The Woman's Labour*, Collier (as Donna Landry has noted) reworks precisely the simile and the passage

in *The Thresher's Labour* which had caused all the trouble in the first place, in which he compared the chattering women falling silent in a rain-shower to a flock of sparrows.

If we are adequately to compare *The Thresher's Labour* and *The Woman's Labour*, then, we must look attentively at their literariness: their intertextual literary contexts and literary modes, the circumstances from which they emerged. The development of laboring-class poetry in the eighteenth century was as much about literary form, how to devise and adapt suitable genres and to draw on literary precedents, as it was about recording the details of one's life. E. P. Thompson's introduction to the two poems emphasizes the almost unbridgeable divide between high and low culture in the 1730s, but suggests that genius might leap the gap. A good example of such "genius," notwithstanding the self-declared modesty of its author's poetic ability, was Stephen Duck's apparently unprecedented reversal of pastoral expectations in his unfolding of the rural year and the farming calendar. *The Thresher's Labour* is not, of course, the first anti-pastoral, but it is highly unusual in turning the farming year, routinely offered in georgic and pastoral poetry as a positive or at least consolatory image of man's successful interventions in a post-lapsarian world, into an unmistakable reminder of the legacy of the fall. These contradictory views of human social development – the rise of civilization and the loss of Eden – are usually held in balance in the eighteenth-century georgic tradition, in poems like Thomson's *Seasons* (1726–30), where they coexist fairly harmoniously [*see* ch. 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"]. By focusing intently on the hardship of the working year, Duck draws on but undermines a powerful literary convention. He concentrates on the difficulty of his working life, and the inadequacy of compensations and rewards that are available to him. He uses familiar literary materials to do so, but adapts them to his own situation. For example, he uses the view of the shepherd's life as leisurely and harmonious, taken from "golden age" pastorals such as those of Pope (1709), to make a dramatic contrast with life in a gloomy threshing barn:

> Nor yet the tedious Labour to beguile,
> And make the passing Minutes sweetly smile,
> Can we, like Shepherds, tell a merry Tale?
> The voice is lost, drown'd by the noisy Flail.
> *But we may think – alas! what pleasing thing*
> Here to the Mind can the dull Fancy bring?
> The Eye beholds no pleasant object here;
> No cheerful sound diverts the list'ning Ear.
> The Shepherd well may tune his voice to sing,
> Inspir'd by all the beauties of the Spring:
> No Fountains murmur here, no Lambkins play,
> No Linets warble, and no Fields look gay.
> 'Tis all a dull and melancholy Scene,
> Fit only to provoke the Muses' Spleen.
>
> (ll. 50–63)

In more ways than one, Stephen Duck set the foundations for the way in which laboring-class poets would address the subject of labor itself – the condition and activity that dominated their lives. Many poets sought ways specifically to dramatize their own complex positions in relation to labor, using poetry as both a means to describe the prison of physical labor and, simultaneously, a way of possibly escaping from it. Duck alludes on several occasions to the imagery of leisured pastoral, of rural labor as filtered through classical pastoralism. But, as his later neighbor and acquaintance Alexander Pope had once written in his "Discourse on Pastoral Poetry" (written 1704, published 1717), pastoral poets were "not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are." Pastoral poetry was "an image of what they call the Golden age," and it is a telling gesture for Duck to specify that his principal labor, threshing, rules out the singing and storytelling of shepherds – though whether these hypothetical leisured shepherds are intended to be the real ones in Duck's countryside, or the imaginary ones of pastoral poetry, is left unsaid.

Duck similarly uses the pastoral convention of the harvest festival, familiar as the key feature of rural idyll in poems as varied as Herrick's "The Hock-Cart" and Thomson's "Summer." But unlike Herrick or Thomson, Duck dramatically reveals what he calls the "cheat," undermining the triumphalism of the literary harvest scene by leading us straight on to the next morning after the feast when, hung-over and exhausted, the laborers must begin the interminable task all over again:

> But the next Morning soon reveals the Cheat,
> When the same toils we must again repeat,
> To the same Barns again must back return,
> To labour there for room for next year's corn.
> (ll. 278–81)

The principal literary tools of *The Thresher's Labour* and *The Woman's Labour* – respectively, this dramatically reversed form of the pastoral–georgic annual cycle of agriculture, and a satiric rejoinder in what E. P. Thompson describes as "the old folk-mode of the 'argument of the sexes' " – enable Duck and Collier to develop complex and ironic ways of describing their work. Duck wryly acknowledges that the pastoral dream is unsupportable for the poor thresher trapped in the "dull and melancholy" threshing barn, but finds some scope for the heroic mode in the highly skilled team-work of reaping. His reapers go to work like soldiers marching to war. Across the shoulders of each hangs the scythe, the "Weapon destin'd to unclothe the Field" (l. 108). The birds, the only onlookers at this early hour, "salute" them in a dawn chorus. On arrival, they size up the arena for their competitive sport:

> And now the Field design'd our Strength to try
> Appears, and meets at last our longing eye;
> The Grass and Ground each chearfully surveys,
> Willing to see which way th'Advantage lays.
> As the best man, each claims the foremost place,
> And our first work seems but a sportive Race.

With rapid force our well-whet Blades we drive,
Strain every nerve, and blow for blow we give:
Tho' but this Eminence the foremost gains,
Only t'excel the rest in Toil and Pains.
(ll. 111–20)

We saw that Tatersal would also use elements of mock-heroic militarism in describing his daily work routines, perhaps inspired by Duck's reapers marching to their Pyrrhic victory, "t'excel the rest in Toil and Pains." Mary Collier, in contrast, pointedly ignores this male display, perhaps recognizing her female raking/gleaning group as its implied audience (and thus teasingly perpetuating the inattentiveness which may be another reason why Duck's reapers so dislike the women's social talk). Her own work is described in rather different terms, though it shares Duck's pride in achievement, and is driven (in the winter months) by an overseer even worse than Duck's angry, greedy "Master."

The principal difference between the types of work described by Duck and Collier is that Duck appears to be a regular employee, a day laborer, whereas Collier earns a living through a series of seasonal jobs. Where Duck is ordered hither and thither (usually to the threshing barn) by the "Master," Collier must seek out new work for herself, taking it wherever she can and proudly coping with each task, however "mean" (l. 90) it may be. In describing her summer work – the work that brings her into contact with Duck's world of male harvesters – she emphasizes the essential sociability that characterizes the women's approach to work. This enables her to respond to Duck not by denying that women like to talk in the fields (which they do), but by asserting their right to do so. She also describes the way in which the women supplement the wages of harvesting by gleaning corn, a practice whose status in the eighteenth century was in transition from being a customary right to being a charitable gift:

When Harvest comes, into the Field we go,
And help to reap the Wheat as well as you,
Or else we go the ears of Corn to glean,
No Labour scorning, be it e'er so mean,
But in the Work we freely bear a part,
And what we can, perform with all our Heart.
To get a living we so willing are,
Our tender Babes into the Field we bear,
And wrap them in our cloaths to keep them warm,
While round about we gather up the Corn,
And often unto them our course we bend,
To keep them safe, that nothing them offend.
Our Children that are able, bear a share
In gleaning Corn, such is our frugal care.
When Night comes on, unto our home we go,
Our Corn we carry, and our Infant too;
Weary, alas! but 'tis not worth our while
Once to complain, or *rest at ev'ry Stile*.
(ll. 87–104)

As Donna Landry notes, an important feature of the poem is that it shows the "double shift" of women's work. The tender seriousness with which the childcare is managed in the gleaning field, and in this passage (written, notably, by a woman who was herself childless), offers an eloquent rebuke to Duck for his accusations about chattering and laziness. The infants must be kept warm and safe, while the older and stronger ones must help in the harsh work of scraping up ears of corn, "such is our frugal care." And at the end of the day each woman must carry all this home: reason enough for the scornful swipe at Duck here, whose male laborers (burdened by mere weariness) "walk but slow, and rest at every Stile" (*The Thresher's Labour*, l. 152). With a baby, perhaps, on one hip and a sack of gleaned corn on the other, " 'tis not worth our while / Once to complain, or *rest at ev'ry Stile*" (the last phrase pointedly italicized).

Collier's description of her winter "charring" work provides a counterpoint to Duck's main winter activity of threshing. Both offer a picture of alienated labor, for example by showing the effects of dirt in their jobs. Duck shows how threshing peas subverts the familiar paternalistic "cottage door" scene of return, so beloved of eighteenth-century painters:

> When sooty Pease we thresh, you scarce can know
> Our native colour, as from Work we go;
> The sweat, and dust, and suffocating smoke,
> Make us so much like *Ethiopians* look,
> We scare our Wives, when Evening brings us home,
> And frighted Infants think the Bug-bear come.
> (ll. 64–9)

Collier's reply artfully tells of how the work of cleaning pots and pans similarly subverts the women's self-image, wrecking their "tender hands" and burying the lost "Perfections" of their beauty in "Dirt and Filth":

> Alas! our Labours never know an end:
> On brass and iron we our Strength must spend,
> Our tender hands and fingers scratch and tear;
> All this and more, with Patience we must bear.
> Colour'd with Dirt and Filth we now appear;
> Your threshing sooty Peas will not come near.
> All the Perfections Woman once could boast
> Are quite obscur'd, and altogether lost.
> (ll. 215–22)

In both cases these quasi-industrial workplace scenes are completed by intrusive overseers, and again the style of presentation is distinctively different. Duck's overseer is an angry farmer, the "Master," who rants at their laziness at threshing and wastefulness in the harvest:

> He counts the Bushels, counts how much a day,
> Then swears we've idled half our Time away.
> Why, look ye, Rogues! D'ye think that this will do?
> Your Neighbours thresh as much again as you.
> (ll. 74–7)

> Behind our Master waits; and if he spies
> One charitable Ear, he grudging cries,
> "Ye scatter half your Wages o'er the Land."
> Then scrapes the Stubble with his greedy Hand.
> (1736 text, ll. 242–5)

The image of a miserly stubble-scraper in that alliterative final line is a cleverly humorous way of presenting a tyrant. Mary Collier goes for a subtler character assassination of the "Mistress" for whom the women are washing clothes. This work begins well before dawn, but the mistress appears only later:

> At length bright *Sol* illuminates the skies,
> And summons drowsy Mortals to arise.
> Then comes our Mistress to us without fail,
> And in her hand, *perhaps*, a mug of Ale
> To cheer our Hearts, and also to inform
> Herself, what Work is done that very Morn;
> Lays her Commands upon us, that we mind
> Her Linen well, nor *leave the Dirt behind.*
> Not this alone, but also to take care
> We don't her Cambricks or her Ruffles tear,
> And these most strictly does of us require:
> To save her Soap, and sparing be of Fire;
> Tells us her Charge is great, nay, furthermore,
> Her Cloaths are fewer than the time before.
> (ll. 168–81)

The sting is in the little words: "drowsy," "*perhaps*" (italicized to imply "or perhaps not"), "nor . . . Not this alone, but also," "strictly," "sparing," "nay, furthermore," and "fewer." The charges against her are laziness, snooping, meanness, and an airy dishonesty as she paves the way for paying them sixpence rather than eightpence by claiming there are "fewer" clothes "than the time before" (cf. "Sixpence or Eightpence pays us off at last," l. 199).

As with Tatersal's building site, there is a wealth of interesting and detailed information in these competing descriptions of labor: for example, in Collier's cataloguing the fiddly demands of "Holland Shirts, Ruffles and Fringes too, / Fashions which our Forefathers never knew" (ll. 162–3): that is, new fabrics whose presence in the mistress's washing-basket reflect the growth of consumer culture in this period. A social historian would certainly want to take these texts seriously and put them alongside other available sources on eighteenth-century laboring conditions – as Bridget Hill,

for example, does with Collier in her study of *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (1989). But one can equally value the literary resourcefulness and economy of these two poems. It is especially evident that the descriptions of Duck's "Master" and Collier's "Mistress" in the poems are strategically clever, both as literary presentations – the creation of literary "characters" – and as a practical survival strategy in Duck and Collier's non-literary work, where having the measure of, and being able to some degree to laugh at, those who hold the power in the workplace is obviously a potentially important source of strength and self-confidence.

The current popularity of these poems, to return to my opening theme, may perhaps represent their moment of greatest canonical prominence, although what we can piece together of their critical history suggests that they have often been a "hidden" influence that is apt to well up suddenly, for example in later poems of workplace or domestic description. It is hard to measure the precise effect they had on their contemporaries, partly because there is little obvious "reception" to Collier's poem, although it was published in London as well as Petersfield. Its reprinting in 1740, 1762, 1820, as well as in the 1970s and 1980s, must surely suggest a continuing or easily revivable interest, and indeed H. Gustav Klaus (2000) cites evidence that both Duck and Collier still had significant readerships in the early nineteenth century. A rancorous satirical response to Duck's glittering success at Queen Caroline's court seems to have dominated the contemporary response to his work, but a recent rediscovery by John Gilmore, working on eighteenth-century British neo-Latin poetry, reveals a more positive perspective, and perhaps offers an instructive place to conclude. "Ad Stephanum Duck" was published in 1743 (though clearly written earlier) by Vincent Bourne, Master of Westminster School and a near-contemporary of Duck's. Davis (1926) published it in its original Latin, which Gilmore translates as follows:

> *In Praise of Stephen Duck*
> From destiny obscure and humble birth
> The rustic Muse calls toiling *Stephen* forth,
> To please the great at Court and gain renown,
> More than is his who wears the laurel crown.
> A pension's granted thee by royal command,
> The palace gardens' care is in thy hand,
> And, if reports be true, then these beside,
> The *Queen* her library doth to thee confide.
> Yet better days, the care of royal books,
> Do not thy Muse indue with haughty looks.
> Thy ways change not; in spite of worldly gain,
> An humble, modest man thou dost remain,
> As happy in a wain to ride, or coach,
> A pattern to the great – or a reproach.

Gilmore forgivably anticipates Gray's *Elegy* by a few years in line 1, with "destiny obscure": the source phrase, "obscuram vita," is close enough. His translation revives

an apt eighteenth-century tribute to a poet shrewdly seen by Bourne as offering an alternative to the official laureateship, and an example and a "reproach" ("opprobrium") to the great ("magnis"). However magnanimous Duck's own royal reception may have been, Bourne saw beyond the gimmickry of a thresher's elevation, to Duck's essential moral integrity.

The Thresher's Labour, *The Woman's Labour*, and other poems in this tradition can, I think, continue to exert an instructive "moral" influence, by focusing critical and historical attention on those whose labors built their nation's wealth, on their frustrations and feelings of exhaustion (and sometimes of pride), and on their aspiration to engage in cultural activity, a desire most clearly inscribed in the ingenious, double-edged use of neoclassical models and methods in the poems under discussion. This was the *real* revolution they represented: a washerwoman daring to write about her working life in a witty, Popean style; a thresher upending the conventions of classical pastoral and georgic poetry in order to show the rich and powerful what toil it costs to produce corn. It is easy enough to read the story of the eighteenth-century laboring-class poets, from Duck and Collier to Bloomfield and Clare, in terms of containment and ultimate failure. These poets certainly display a keen awareness of the limitations of a life of labor; yet it is precisely in writing about this life in the way they do that they defy such limitations.

See also chs. 10, "John Gay, *The Shepherd's Week*"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 16, "Mary Leapor, "Crumble-Hall"; 40, "Rural Poetry and the Self-Taught Tradition."

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16
Mary Leapor, "Crumble-Hall"

David Fairer

There is something miraculous about the phenomenon of Mary Leapor (1722–46), a Northamptonshire kitchen-maid who wrote sparkling, intelligent poetry in the spare moments when she wasn't cleaning and keeping house for others. She died at the age of twenty-four before her first book of poems could be published, just when she was emerging from provincial obscurity and beginning to attract the attention of the London literary establishment. To become a poet at all, given her laboring-class origins, was remarkable, though far from unique in a century when "self-taught" poets were catching the public's imagination; but what makes Leapor special is her sharp eye and subtle ear, her ironic alertness to social performance and poetic conventionality. She responds satirically to anything predictable and false, and while she echoes other poets – notably Pope – she plays with and around their work, giving ideas a particular twist or individual nuance. She rarely offers her voice for our approval or patronage; indeed, she enjoys projecting herself as "Mira," an awkward, garrulous, impatient, daydreaming, and distinctly unprepossessing young lady. Like so many of her creations, Leapor's poetic name (from the Latin *miror*, to "wonder" or "marvel at") is double-edged: as a poetical serving-girl "Mira" is a miracle to others; but the name also hints at her own capacity to wonder (admiringly or satirically) at the world around her – and to give rein to her imagination. Leapor is forever wondering about things: hinting, conjecturing, or having doubts. This enigmatic self-image is part of a game Mira is constantly playing with the world and with us, and it makes her poetic voice an intriguing one. Let her introduce herself:

> You see I'm learned, and I shew't the more,
> That none may wonder when they find me poor.
> Yet *Mira* dreams, as slumbring Poets may,
> And rolls in Treasures till the breaking Day:
> While Books and Pictures in bright Order rise,
> And painted Parlours swim before her Eyes:

> Till the shrill Clock impertinently rings,
> And the soft Visions move their shining Wings:
> Then *Mira* wakes, – her Pictures are no more,
> And through her Fingers slides the vanish'd Ore.
> Convinc'd too soon, her Eye unwilling falls
> On the blue Curtains and the dusty Walls:
> She wakes, alas! to Business and to Woes,
> To sweep her Kitchen, and to mend her Clothes.
> ("An Epistle to a Lady," ll. 19–32)

Mira loves mixing the quirky and the predictable, and here in the opening couplet she toys with our expectations, our readiness to "wonder" at this highly literate housemaid. She insists to us that she is merely conforming to the traditional stereotype of the poor scholar or starving poet. Indeed, the scene that follows resembles a recent popular print, *The Distrest Poet* by William Hogarth (1737), which pictures the poverty-stricken poet writing in his garret, while above him tantalizingly hangs a map entitled "A View of the Gold Mines of Peru." In her imagination Mira "rolls in Treasures," but hers are the riches of the mind. She dreams of having a house of her own, but the only furnishings mentioned are "Books and Pictures" – things that will feed her thoughts. It is a parlor and a library that she covets – a place for warmth and intimate conversation, and a place to read quietly. This is Leapor's world. But the clock chimes, and, like Pope's Belinda at the opening of *The Rape of the Lock*, she experiences the moment between sleeping and waking when fantasy lingers in the consciousness. In Leapor's poem the transition is compressed into a single line: "And the soft Visions move their shining Wings." The dream prepares to leave, but offers a last glitter of its wings before flying away. Now awake, Mira feels the gold dust slipping through her fingers, and her eyes focus on the material world where the "dusty Walls" recall her to her servant's duties of cleaning, sweeping, and mending. In Hogarth's print the poet's wife sits beside him darning clothes, and Leapor ends her passage with her own satiric overlaying of his two images: she is poet and seamstress in one. We end the passage full of wonder – but at the way she has taken a hackneyed idea and wittily reworked it.

Leapor probably had a rudimentary education at the local dame school in Brackley, where her father ran a nursery garden, and she had the chance to develop her reading while in service at nearby Weston Hall. Its owner, Susanna Jennens (*née* Blencowe), had literary interests, and the library was well stocked with the works of the poets, dramatists, and essayists. Jennens evidently encouraged her employee's writing, and in the subscription list for Leapor's *Poems* (1748) the Blencowe family is well represented. By the end of her short life Leapor had accumulated her own small shelf of books, "of about sixteen or seventeen single Volumes, among which were Part of Mr. *Pope*'s Works, *Dryden*'s Fables, some Volumes of Plays, &c." We learn this from the memoir written by Bridget Freemantle, daughter of a local rector, who became the poet's close friend after Leapor returned to Brackley to keep house for her father. Freemantle speaks warmly of her good nature and cheerfulness, and of her extraordinary fluency

with the pen, "her Thoughts seeming to flow as fast as she could put them upon Paper." Philip Leapor recalled that his only daughter "would often be scribbling, and sometimes in Rhyme," and it seems that this tendency sometimes distracted her from her servant's duties. The only other employment we know about is her job as a kitchen-maid at Edgcote House, a big, old, untidy house owned by the Chauncy family. Many years later an anonymous correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (perhaps one of the Chauncys) recalled Leapor "sometimes taking up her pen while the jack was standing still, and the meat scorching." At Edgcote she was apparently expected to fulfill the most menial of kitchen tasks – turning the "jack" or roasting-spit over the fire. It is the kind of vivid detail recorded in her poem about Edgcote, "Crumble-Hall," which appeared in the second volume of *Poems* (1751).

"Crumble-Hall," like the building it describes, is rambling, full of character, and crammed with odd details. Mira acts throughout as our guide, and not just poetically. She is there at our side, pointing out objects to interest us; or ahead of us, walking briskly through the labyrinth of corridors and twisting staircases, telling us to mind our head. Under such circumstances the reader should be cautious about summarizing the poem's "theme," or fixing it with a single viewpoint. We are being kept on the move, and to be true to the poem's character any reading of it ought to acknowledge its elusiveness. There is no fixed angle of vision, but a series of glimpses, and the reader feels almost physically the variety of spaces that are drawn to our attention – by turns lofty and narrow, public and private, busy and somnolent, dark and light. The many different rooms, each with its distinctive ambience and particular furniture, come before us in no logical order, but each is part of the life of the house. It is a world through which Leapor moves with assurance, like a guide to an old property where she feels at home, and we are only visitors. As critics, therefore, we have to be careful about making up our minds too easily.

Critical discussion of the poem has certainly found it hard to agree. During the 1990s, with the rediscovery of Leapor's work, "Crumble-Hall" became one of her most admired and discussed poems, but sharp differences have arisen about what kind of poem it is, and what attitude the poet takes to her subject. Is it a satire on Edgcote or a celebration of it? Does Leapor speak with the radical voice of an oppressed servant class, or is she happy with her menial place? Is the poem conventional or subversive of convention? Each reader has to find his or her own bearings on these questions; however, such either/or alternatives oversimplify interpretation and tempt us to package up the poem and its author too conveniently. At some moments in describing Crumble-Hall, Leapor clearly has in mind Pope's *Epistle to Burlington* (1731), with its satiric portrait of the empty magnificence of "Timon's villa" contrasted with the civilized values of Lord Burlington and William Kent; but Pope's dualities – good and bad taste, right and wrong expense, natural and unnatural landscape, humane and pompous architecture, usefulness and mere show, sociability and egotism – need not imply that Leapor's poem is constructed round similar binaries. To read the poem as a satire does not mean that it is mounting an attack on its subject: a satire can employ its ironies more playfully and more variously. We have also to be careful

about projecting onto this eighteenth-century servant-girl a set of attitudes based on later models of class conflict, "them" against "us." Indeed, the very concept of an "attitude" implies a relatively stable viewpoint, something that the poem's restless and miscellaneous character might be challenging.

The most provocative and influential reading of "Crumble-Hall" has been that of Landry (1990), who places it within a "satiric scheme" based on a binary of domination/suppression. Leapor the servant is writing back at the system of male hierarchy that the house represents; hers is a plebeian viewpoint "that undeniably mocks and seeks to demystify the values of the gentry, whose social power in large part depends upon the deference – and the continued exploitable subservience – of servants and laborers" (p. 107). Greene (1993) takes the opposite view, finding in the poem "a conservative view of society organized around principles of dependence and obligation," in which Leapor looks back nostalgically to an older social and economic order (pp. 139–40). Griffin (1996) also disagrees with Landry's "ideological" interpretation and prefers to focus on the text as "ironic observation of country-house poem conventions"; Leapor's stance as a poet, he concludes, "seems resignation and bemused ironic deference rather than resentment and anger" (p. 195). In a thoughtfully contextualized discussion of the poem, Rumbold (1996) returns to a more radical Leapor, an "alienated insider" who indeed disrupts the conventions of the country-house poem, but does so in a satirically demystifying way: "Leapor's sense of the grand house as a heap of scattered effects . . . expresses a systematic and radical refusal to be impressed, a refusal to construct any coherent aesthetic effect which could resonate with idealizing symbolism" (p. 67). Issues of structural coherence and interpretative detail obviously play an important part in identifying the poem's social message (what critics nowadays tend to call its "politics") – but again there is a danger that thinking in either/or terms will oversimplify. If the poem refuses to idealize, does that constitute criticism? Is Crumble-Hall's incoherence (or lack of cohesion) something negative? Is the house meant to represent a "system," and, if so, is it a system that has broken down or is functioning badly? Or does the poem take pleasure in the unsystematic, and find something positive in the degree to which the life of the place seems to lie in its accumulation of richly varied materials without imposing order or system upon them? This latter possibility needs to be borne in mind as we take a tour of the house.

As Greene notes (1993: 16), Edgcote was a building with a long and distinguished past, and an awareness of its history and physical features can help make sense of some of the details in Leapor's poem. It was owned by Henry V while Prince of Wales (i.e. prior to 1413 when he became king), and in the next century it was in the possession of Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's chief minister, who was executed in 1540 partly because of his responsibility for the King's disastrous marriage to Anne of Cleves. By a neat irony, Edgcote was seized by Henry and given to Anne as part of the costly divorce settlement. A few years later it was bought by William Chauncy, a wealthy lawyer. A surviving drawing of the house dating from 1721 (Heward and Taylor 1996: 19) conveys its sprawling character and shows that it had developed in a

piecemeal way, with odd variations in floor level and extensions from different periods, including projecting turrets and a highly elaborate porch added to the main entrance. It is in all senses a "gothic" building, one that, when viewed as a whole, presents a confused mixture of styles and hints at an interior full of fascinating twists and turns. In "Crumble-Hall" Leapor has designed a poem whose aesthetics match those of the house. It is not a grand structure, or one that encourages formality and order; instead it offers corners in which to hide and escape – for those who know their way around. Leapor is clearly such a person, and we have no choice but to place ourselves in her hands and listen carefully.

The lively, talkative qualities of the voice that guides us are established from the outset, where Leapor presents herself in the character of Mira – here in a moping and depressed mood, "With low'ring Forehead, and with aching Limbs, / Oppress'd with Head-ach, and eternal Whims" (ll. 3–4). At this point she is determined to abandon poetry altogether; but the weather suddenly brightens, and her friend Artemisia (Bridget Freemantle) arrives to cheer her up:

> Then in a trice the Resolutions fly;
> And who so frolick as the Muse and I?
> We sing once more, obedient to her Call;
> Once more we sing; and 'tis of *Crumble-Hall* . . .
> (ll. 9–12)

This opening links the poem to the tradition of the eighteenth-century verse letter, a sociable form that exploits the qualities of good conversation. The tone of voice modulates as the talk moves through different subjects. "Artemisia" becomes an addressee along with us, and her good-humored encouragement gives Mira the confidence to begin the tour. But first, before we even glimpse the building, it is presented to us through its history – how it used to be in medieval and Elizabethan times. Mira is aware of the house's tradition of hospitality, and in her role as host she is sensitive to the old courtesies – of greeting strangers and feeding your guests generously. It is good that we should feel welcome, as generations have done before us:

> That *Crumble-Hall*, whose hospitable Door
> Has fed the Stranger, and reliev'd the Poor;
> Whose *Gothic* Towers, and whose rusty Spires,
> Were known of old to Knights, and hungry Squires.
> There powder'd Beef, and Warden-Pies, were found;
> And Pudden dwelt within her spacious Bound:
> Pork, Peas, and Bacon (good old *English* Fare!),
> With tainted Ven'son, and with hunted Hare:
> With humming Beer her Vats were wont to flow,
> And ruddy *Nectar* in her Vaults to glow.
> (ll. 13–22)

As Mira presents it, this was no mere aristocratic institution, but a place of wider social provision that included the stranger and the poor. Charity was dispensed from its "hospitable Door," and the house was part of the old system of poor relief. Inside, the emphasis is not on male authority, but on female domesticity (the sweet wine glows in "*her* Vaults"), and in place of a static order the lines describe how everyone joined in and mixed together – the knight, the traveling friar, and the peasant ("Clown"). The "old *English* Fare" of those days was generous and inclusive:

> Here came the Wights, who battled for Renown,
> The sable Frier, and the russet Clown:
> The loaded Tables sent a sav'ry Gale,
> And the brown Bowls were crown'd with simp'ring Ale;
> While the Guests ravag'd on the smoking Store,
> Till their stretch'd Girdles would contain no more.
> (ll. 23–8)

The emphasis is on fullness, not exclusion. The house's "spacious Bound" (l. 18), like the bellies of her guests, was able to accommodate a great deal, and there was more than enough to go round.

Landry's reading of this passage doesn't quite enter into the spirit of things: "the venison is tainted," she notes, "the vulnerable hare has been hunted to death to provide meat for this already groaning table, the guests gorge themselves until they are grossly bloated" (1990: 109). As Greene points out (1993: 139), "tainted" actually means having a "gamy" smell, a sign that the venison was well hung and ideal for eating. Like the hares, the deer were home-reared, and, as Greene says (p. 139), there is no reason to think that Leapor ("a kitchen-maid who had regularly to dress fowls, and probably to wring their necks") was at all squeamish about hares. The language in fact shows her determination to bring the scene alive to the senses, as if to whet our appetites: "humming" (l. 21) means "really strong" and recalls Stephen Duck's enthusiastic celebration of the harvest feast in *The Thresher's Labour*: "A Table plentifully spread we find, / And Jugs of humming Beer to cheer the Mind" (ll. 270–1). "Smoking" and "simp'ring" (simmering) are similarly meant to tickle our palates.

The description makes the house's former character palpable, as though we can still smell and taste the food. This evocation is linked to our sense of the building's old spirit of generosity and capaciousness – its ability to contain so much history and so many layers of human experience. The place is an antique survival, and if it has a soul it does not lie in the possession of the Chauncys, who a few years later pulled the whole ramshackle edifice down. By stressing Edgcote's rich past, Leapor takes it out of the hands of its present owners – who make only a fleeting appearance in the poem – and suggests its independent life. From the outset we see that it is an inconvenient, gothic building. Bits have been added on here and there; part is brick, part stone; the rooms are a jumble, and there is no sign of planning. Like history itself, the house and its contents have somehow accumulated over time. The "gothic" elements of the

poem therefore can be viewed as resisting an imposed order. Its aesthetic is defiantly not one of beauty and harmony, but of decay, disorder, untidiness, and mixture, in which the grotesque is repeatedly invoked. It is important to stress that these elements are not, as they would tend to be in Pope or Swift, inherently negative. The effects of this gothic aesthetic in the poem are more subtle, and we should not automatically assume that anything untidy or grotesque is being subjected to satiric disapproval. It is, after all, the place that Leapor's wealthy employers want to get rid of.

Nevertheless, there is satiric potential in the way Mira's eyes scan the details of the building. The effect is more than slightly forbidding:

> two grim Giants o'er the Portals stand;
> Whose grisled Beards are neither comb'd nor shorn,
> But look severe, and horribly adorn [= "ornate"].
> Then step within – there stands a goodly Row
> Of oaken Pillars – where a gallant Show
> Of mimic Pears and carv'd Pomgranates twine,
> With the plump Clusters of the spreading Vine.
> Strange Forms above, present themselves to View;
> Some Mouths that grin, some smile, and some that spew.
> Here a soft Maid or Infant seems to cry:
> Here stares a Tyrant, with distorted Eye . . .
> (ll. 32–42)

The elaborate stone porch in Elizabethan style, with its "high ornate gable decorated with an achievement of arms flanked by statues in niches" (Heward and Taylor 1996: 204), was thrust out from the front of the house to provide a grand entrance. It was probably erected to receive Queen Elizabeth when she visited Edgcote in 1572, and Her Majesty would have been expected to appreciate the symbolic carvings. The two "grim Giants" were probably Gog and Magog, the mythical guardians of the City of London's liberties, familiar to the queen from the statues at the Guildhall. For Mira they are little more than a pair of ruffians. Passing inside, Elizabeth would note the symbols of fertility (pomegranates) and fruition – at a moment when she was contemplating marriage with the Duke of Alençon. Mira delights in their lifelike mimicry. Above her head the grotesque carved heads make a vivid impression, but if there was any symbolic narrative here Mira ignores it. She does, however, recognize an angry tyrant when she sees him.

In this passage an innocent eye ignores the visual imagery that underpinned state ceremonial. Standing where Her Majesty stood, Mira looks at things in a very different way. Her meanings tend to be literal ones, readings of the surface that leave symbolic interpretations alone. In this sense her language is humorously "demystifying." But she is not afraid to introduce imagery of her own alongside the observed physical detail, and the effect can be disconcerting. Instead of having a scene composed for us, we are given a rapid succession of different effects. This happens on entering the great hall:

> The Roof – no *Cyclops* e'er could reach so high:
> Not *Polypheme*, tho' form'd for dreadful Harms,
> The Top could measure with extended Arms.
> Here the pleas'd Spider plants her peaceful Loom:
> Here weaves secure, nor dreads the hated Broom.
> But at the Head (and furbish'd once a Year)
> The Heralds mystic Compliments appear:
> Round the fierce Dragon *Honi Soit* twines,
> And Royal *Edward* o'er the Chimney shines.
> (ll. 43–51)

At the very moment we notice the roof, Mira makes us imagine Polyphemus, the threatening giant in Homer's *Odyssey*, reaching up into its lofty spaces. But in the next line the effect is utterly different, and in place of the fearful monster we notice the tiny spider weaving its web in peace. Our eyes then switch to the carved coat of arms ("The Heralds mystic Compliments") which takes us into the world of medieval chivalry and the house's royal associations. Henry V was a Knight of the Order of the Garter, established by Edward III ("Royal *Edward*") in the fourteenth century. Its patron saint was St George, and the carving evidently showed him slaying the dragon, entwined with the motto of the order, *Honi soit qui mal y pense* ("Shame be to him who thinks evil of it"). The succession is dizzying: from Homer's Cyclops, to the domestic spider, to the garter knight's regalia. There is no hierarchy here, and the effect seems confused – until we realize that what links these details are the thoughts of a servant who had to clean the place. At various times Mira must have wished for the "extended Arms" of Polyphemus, noticed the spider's web out of reach of her broom, remembered that the coat of arms would soon need its annual clean, and checked that the carved wooden chimneypiece was well polished.

The old symbolic meanings of Crumble-Hall may have fallen away, but this does not drain the house of its richness or make its world less fascinating to Mira's eyes. For her it has developed many new meanings. It has become a great benign storehouse where many lives can be lived. We have already noticed the spider, who feels at home where the dust accumulates. There are also spooky, dark passageways, but these make an ideal refuge for the mice:

> Safely the Mice through yon dark Passage run,
> Where the dim Windows ne'er admit the Sun.
> Along each Wall the Stranger blindly feels;
> And (trembling) dreads a Spectre at his Heels.
> (ll. 52–5)

Mira enjoys squeezing the mice and the disoriented visitor into the same space. The "gothic" character of the house is clearly double-edged. In the mind of the "Stranger" it may create sublime terror; but for Mira, who knows the place, its elements of

wildness and confusion create a mixed economy in which all forms of life, however humble, can find a home:

> These Rooms are furnish'd amiably, and full:
> Old Shoes, and Sheep-ticks bred in Stacks of Wool;
> Grey *Dobbin*'s Gears, and Drenching-Horns enow;
> Wheel-spokes – the Irons of a tatter'd Plough.
>
> (ll. 98–101)

It is a house where nothing seems ever to have been thrown away. Crumble-Hall is crammed with characters, living and dead, historical and mythological (here Dobbin the old horse lingers on in spirit), and various odd contraptions that no longer work but still reside there. Inside the piled-up wool the sheep ticks live undisturbed, part of the organic microcosm of the place. The phrase "amiably, and full" is characteristic of a poem where elements of chaos and confusion become part of a good-natured gothic excess. What might be satiric juxtapositions tend to be viewed as intriguing mixtures.

This idea is crucial to the "politics" of the poem. As Leapor presents it, Edgcote is not a place that is easily controlled. In an elegant neoclassical building like Burlington's Chiswick House, with its interiors by William Kent (celebrated in Pope's *Epistle*), every space is ordered and harmoniously proportioned in the "Palladian" style, its levels hierarchically planned so that the *piano nobile* (the first floor containing the formal public rooms) would be set apart from the domestic spaces; but in Crumble-Hall things tend to be jumbled together. Not surprisingly, Mira isn't bothered about ideas of classical proportion, and mocks the notion of "Form": "The Form – 'tis neither long, nor round, nor square; / The Walls how lofty, and the Floor how wide, / We leave for learned *Quadrus* to decide" (ll. 65–7). As she presents it, the house has no "formal" life, and matters of form seem to go by the board. In such a place it is hard to watch over the servants, and this particular kitchen-maid has obviously had lots of opportunities to roam and to pry. The great hall, at ground level (where muddy boots would make expensive carpets impossible) evidently functions as a corridor, across which the staff come and go:

> Shall we proceed? – Yes, if you'll break the Wall:
> If not, return, and tread once more the Hall.
> Up ten Stone Steps now please to drag your Toes,
> And a brick Passage will succeed to those.
>
> (ll. 84–7)

The equivalent satiric passage in Pope's *Epistle to Burlington* is entirely different in its implications:

> My Lord advances with majestic mien,
> Smit with the mighty pleasure, to be seen:

But soft – by regular approach – not yet –
First thro' the length of yon hot Terrace sweat,
And when up ten steep slopes you've drag'd your thighs,
Just at his Study-door he'll bless your eyes.
(ll. 127–32)

There is no doubt who is in command of these vast spaces. Lord Timon rules over his domain, and the guest has to rise, with painful slowness, to his majestic level. In Crumble-Hall the owners have no such vantage-point, and although we sense that Mira would like to knock the wall through and make a convenient short cut for herself, there is a certain glee in the way she, a mere menial servant, can boss us around:

Would you go farther? – Stay a little then:
Back thro' the Passage – down the Steps again;
Thro' yon dark Room – Be careful how you tread
Up these steep Stairs – or you may break your Head.
(ll. 94–7)

Where Pope satirizes the layout of Timon's villa as a stage-set for its owner's pride and control, Leapor's scene has a servant in charge, warning, advising, and directing. The owners of Crumble-Hall are kept out of the way, except for the moment when Mira lets us peep into the library. Here we find someone who clearly doesn't appreciate his surroundings or value what he has. For someone who so prized her own handful of books, her master's indifference to his collection is to be noted with a touch of contempt:

Here *Biron* sleeps, with Books encircled round;
And him you'd guess a Student most profound.
Not so – in Form the dusty Volumes stand:
There's few that wear the Mark of *Biron*'s Hand.
(ll. 90–3)

The phrase "in Form" is the devastating one. The books stand in their orderly arrangement – they exist only for ceremony, for what they say to a visitor, not for what they mean for the owner. They are, for Leapor, symbolic. This distinction helps us appreciate both the house and the poem, where "form" and symbolism are shunned, and it is informality – even an element of formlessness – that generates life and meaning.

But Leapor has promised us a landscape description, one of whose formal features was the "prospect," where the poet occupies a commanding position and displays the sweeping view for the reader. It is almost as though she realizes she is doing this only for form's sake; and when Mira finally coaxes us up to a small door in the lead roof, where a panorama of the Edgcote estate is waiting, the result is brief and characterless. We reach it exhausted and protesting, but she must go through with it:

No farther – Yes, a little higher, pray:
At yon small Door you'll find the Beams of Day,
While the hot Leads return the scorching Ray.
Here a gay Prospect meets the ravish'd Eye:
Meads, Fields, and Groves, in beauteous Order lie.
(ll. 102–6)

That is all we are given. After the vivid, confused details of the house, the moment when we are ready to contemplate the "beauteous Order" of Edgcote becomes a poetic anti-climax. Lines 105–6 are bland and cursory in the extreme (anyone could have written them), and the scene is generalized to nothing. It is clearly with a sense of relief that Mira acknowledges this is not a place where her muse feels at home:

From hence the Muse precipitant is hurl'd,
And drags down *Mira* to the nether World.
(ll. 107–8)

The underworld that awaits is the kitchen, a busy, warm place full of enticing smells, where all the estate servants and the dogs congregate. At last we recognize how the old traditions of Edgcote hospitality are continuing. Here is to be found the modern equivalent of those guests who once "ravag'd on the smoking Store, / Till their stretch'd Girdles would contain no more" (ll. 27–8):

O'er stuff'd with Beef; with Cabbage much too full,
And Dumpling too (fit Emblem of his Skull!)
With Mouth wide open, but with closing Eyes
Unwieldy *Roger* on the Table lies.
(ll. 130–3)

There is something of the house's character in unwieldy Roger, a modern gargoyle stirring into life. He is a living descendant of those carved faces on the porch roof ("Some Mouths that grin, some smile, and some that spew," l. 40), and in him the grotesque is humanized. While Biron takes his dignified sleep alone in the library, Roger becomes part of a social comedy, with his disappointed lover, Ursula, improvising an amusing anti-pastoral scene around the kitchen table ("I baste the Mutton with a chearful Heart, / Because I know my *Roger* will have Part," ll. 148–9).

The person who presides over this comic "nether World" is Sophronia the pastry-cook, whose skill and experience make her another figure who embodies both the spirit and the mixed aesthetics of Leapor's poem:

Sophronia sage! whose learned Knuckles know
To form round Cheese-cakes of the pliant Dough;
To bruise the Curd, and thro' her Fingers squeeze

> *Ambrosial* Butter with the temper'd Cheese:
> Sweet Tarts and Pudden, too, her Skill declare;
> And the soft Jellies, hid from baneful Air.
> (ll. 115–20)

Sophronia, too, continues the tradition of the house, and her mixture is a particularly delicious one. As a culinary artist she knows how to "form" the cheesecakes, but she does so by bruising and squeezing her materials, working them together with energy and flair. Form is not an imposed regularity, but a shaping of the "pliant" ingredients. This is the message that Leapor's Crumble-Hall has for life and art. It is not a modern idea, but an old theme that has grown over centuries with the house itself.

But by the end of the poem all these untidy generosities are about to be cleared away. Mira finally takes us out into the garden, which is a place where art has allowed nature to be herself, and where she too is free to "let frolick Fancy rove" (l. 156). This is Mira's natural playful mode ("who so frolick as the Muse and I?," l. 10), and the scene delights her with its surfaces, colors, and reflections. Around the lake the water-reeds ("Flags") contribute their sharpness to the softened forms:

> Soft flow'ry Banks the spreading Lakes divide:
> Sharp-pointed Flags adorn each tender Side.
> See! The pleas'd Swans along the Surface play;
> Where yon cool Willows meet the scorching Ray . . .
> (ll. 160–3)

In this landscape opposing effects (the "pointed" and the "tender," the "cool" and the "scorching"), rather than being harmoniously compromised, are set in lively and refreshing contrast. This consciously "poetic" and composed passage comes as something of a relief after the steaming activity of the kitchen ("But now her Dish-Kettle began / To boil and blubber with the foaming Bran," 150–1) – but it is a tactical composure, soon broken by an unexpected scream:

> But, hark! What Scream the wond'ring Ear invades!
> The *Dryads* howling for their threaten'd Shades:
> Round the dear Grove each Nymph distracted flies.
> (ll. 165–7)

There is nothing "demystifying" about Leapor's approach here – quite the contrary. Mira's landscape is full of invisible spirits, and the emotive imagery of invasion and violation tells us that she is no rationalist. The felling of the grove is a sign that change is on the way, and the magic of the place is disappearing. The old romantic place is about to be opened up, with the shady, tangled woods transformed into smooth slopes. Edgcote's days were indeed numbered, and its gardens are beginning to feel the effects of the formal "improvements" begun in 1742 (Heward and Taylor 1996: 206). As for the buildings, the kitchen was pulled down three years later, and in 1748 the rambling gothic house was demolished.

Its replacement was constructed to an elegant Palladian design (complete with *piano nobile*) by William Jones of London, a follower of William Kent and author of *The Gentlemens or Builder's Companion, containing variety of usefull designs for doors, gateways, peers, pavilions, temples, &c.* (1739). No doubt Pope would have approved.

Leapor's poem, however, although often recalling Pope's *Epistle to Burlington*, raises questions about the artistic principles his poem endorses. "In all, let Nature never be forgot," advises Pope, "Consult the Genius of the Place in all" (ll. 50, 57). These are fine sentiments; but Leapor's poem about the "Genius" of Crumble-Hall complicates both the idea and the decorous aesthetic on which it is founded. Her guiding spirit is no abstraction, but something woven into the physical fabric of the place; and her "Nature" is not a shaping ideal, but someone who would prefer to be left alone. The poem suggests that Leapor would have nodded in sympathy with Joseph Warton's rhetorical question: "Can Kent design like nature?" ("The Enthusiast," 1744, l. 47). But as Mira watches the felled trees being carted away, she is conscious of another dimension to the unnaturalness, one that is bound up with a notion of respecting the past and valuing your links with it. She laments the loss of "those Shades,"

> Whose rev'rend Oaks have known a hundred Springs;
> Shall these ignobly from their Roots be torn,
> And perish shameful, as the abject Thorn;
> While the slow Carr bears off their aged Limbs,
> To clear the Way for Slopes, and modern Whims;
> Where banish'd Nature leaves a barren Gloom,
> And aukward Art supplies the vacant Room?
> (ll. 172–8)

It is clear that what is being severed here is a palpable continuity between past and present, and we realize that Leapor has throughout been keeping this idea in view. There are no vacant rooms in "Crumble-Hall." On the contrary, what comes across to readers is the sheer fullness of its life. This is never exhausted, and criticism will continue to find new aspects to focus on. It is understanding the life within the art that is the challenge and reward of the poem.

See also chs. 8, "Women Poets and Their Writing in Eighteenth-Century Britain"; 31, "The Constructions of Femininity"; 40, "Rural Poetry and the Self-Taught Tradition."

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17
Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination*

Adam Rounce

Perhaps no type of poetry seems more remote from the modern reader than the eighteenth-century didactic poem. The very word "didactic" suggests a heavy, arid, pedagogic mode of writing, seemingly antithetical to any contemporary impression of art as "self-expression." It is not the least of the many paradoxes in the reputation of Mark Akenside's didactic poem *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744), a work that found enormous Europe-wide success soon after its publication, that it should, for much of the twentieth century, have been relegated to an academic backwater of long eighteenth-century treatises on aesthetics. For Akenside wrote to be read not by the specialized few but by a general audience, and his poem was nothing less than a manifesto for how individuals could cultivate, encourage, and ultimately perfect their powers of imaginative appreciation in order to improve themselves, and consequently the whole world. Although he (predictably) failed to achieve these lofty aims, he followed such poetic giants as Milton and Pope, and influenced Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats, among others, leaving a lasting and very unusual work of art. In what follows, I summarize Akenside's intentions in the poem, explain their intellectual context, and suggest ways in which, despite its peculiarities, *The Pleasures of Imagination* can be approached, understood, and enjoyed by a reader in the twenty-first century.

Didactic Poetry

To begin, the impression of the didactic poem bearing something of the schoolteacher about it is misleading. The principal point for a reader of Akenside to grasp is that his choice of a type, or genre, of writing guaranteed certain principles, models, and expectations in the poem. For the eighteenth-century poet, the choice of genre was deliberate and important: each different genre had different ambitions and intentions. After the lasting success of *Paradise Lost*, for instance, the attempt at writing an epic poem became (understandably) more perilous, requiring the poet to aim at

the standard of Milton's great model. This was no easy task, given that the epic form was seen as the genre which demanded most of the poet; to put the matter bluntly, an epic poem *could* (and should) be more significant and of more consequence than a sonnet, no matter how finely tuned the latter, just as a painting on an historical or mythological theme would be expected to have greater and more lasting importance than a portrait. [*See* ch. 26, "EPIC AND MOCK-HEROIC."] Such generic hierarchies have often been reduced by subsequent criticism to crude evaluative schema, representing a sort of enforcement of taste; this is far from being the case. Generic distinctions offered both artist and audience a clear set of general outlines about the compass, scope, and purpose of a particular work. Rather than restricting a poet to strict "correctness," the effect was more often to aggregate the particular pleasures of each different type of writing. By superimposing our own values on the works of the past, without considering that people wrote for utterly different reasons and audiences, we misunderstand the nature of the works we read; moreover, it is likely that the reader of *The Pleasures of Imagination* would move from frustration to complete bafflement, unless they first considered what kind of poem Akenside was producing, and for what specific reasons.

Didactic poetry was hardly a rigid genre, as the definition by Hugh Blair in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) indicates. For Blair, "The highest species" of didactic poetry "is a regular treatise on some philosophical, grave, or useful subject. Of this nature we have several, both ancient and modern, of great merit and character: such as Lucretius's six Books De Rerum Natura, Virgil's Georgics, Pope's Essay on Criticism, Akenside's Pleasures of the Imagination, Armstrong on Health, Horace's, Vida's, and Boileau's Art of Poetry" (Blair 1783: vol. 2, 362). With the exception of John Armstrong's *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744), Blair places Akenside among lofty company: we will return to the importance of the Latin poets Lucretius and Virgil for Akenside, but the most obvious point of Blair's list is that all the poems (such as the different treatises on the art of poetry by Horace, Vida, and Boileau) are works of instruction on a "useful subject," whether general or specific. Blair enumerates the qualities required by the genre: "In all such works, as instruction is the professed object, the fundamental merit consists in sound thought, just principles, clear and apt illustrations." Furthermore, it is not enough merely to get the abstractions of a subject across – a prose treatise could do that: "The Poet must instruct; but he must study, at the same time, to enliven his instructions, by the introduction of such figures, and such circumstances, as may amuse the imagination, may conceal the dryness of his subject, and embellish it with poetical painting" (Blair 1783: vol. 2, 363). Instruction must therefore be combined with enjoyment, or the purpose of the exercise is removed. On these terms, Akenside has, for Blair, succeeded: "In English, Dr. Akenside has attempted the most rich and poetical form of Didactic Writing, in his Pleasures of the Imagination; and though, in the execution of the whole, he is not equal, he has, in several parts, succeeded happily, and displayed much genius" (Blair 1783: vol. 2, 367). This was not isolated praise, although its criticism of Akenside's unevenness was also reiterated in the many critical responses to his very successful

poem. For the sheer weight of editions and reprintings of Akenside's work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tells its own story: Akenside's didactic poem succeeded in both teaching and entertaining.

Models, Influences, Purposes

Today, *The Pleasures of Imagination* is studied and kept in academic circulation by a small but abiding and involved body of critical work that produced its most significant results in Robin Dix's comprehensively annotated edition of the complete poetry in 1996. Yet this was the first new edition of Akenside's poetry for a hundred years. A look back at library catalogues is instructive, however: editions and translations of his complete works, and *The Pleasures of Imagination* in particular, were so often reprinted that there is not a decade from the 1740s to the 1890s when an edition containing *The Pleasures of Imagination* was not published. This is as remarkable as the poem's going through seven editions in Akenside's own lifetime, and its being translated into French, German, and Italian within twenty years of its initial publication. (The posthumous edition of his poetry, published in 1772 by his friend Jeremiah Dyson, contained Akenside's unfinished five-book rewriting of the poem under the slightly different title "The Pleasures of the Imagination." It has not often been preferred to the original three-book version, the one discussed in this essay.) Such huge success reiterates two general points of importance, already touched upon: the poem was not intended for a specialized audience; and it tapped into an existing taste for the poetic treatment of an apparently abstract subject.

Akenside's models for this taste were many and various. Virgil's *Georgics* were, for the eighteenth century, not just a poetic manual on agricultural labor and cultivation, but an inclusive mode of writing that allowed (among many other things) the fullest range of descriptive scenes and prospects, encouraging fecundity and variety of images of nature. Moreover, the georgic form gave license for the most apparently incongruous subjects to be rendered into poetry [*see* ch. 29, "The Georgic"]. Lucretius' *De Rerum Naturum* ("On the Nature of Things"), important as the vessel of the influential philosophy of Epicureanism, was another ideal model for Akenside. Lucretius' study of the matter of the universe and of the nature of existence allows the broadest philosophical questions to commingle with more detailed scenes, and inspires the didactic poem to follow a thread of argument, interleaved with many descriptive passages and related ideas and anecdotes. If such works provided an overall template for Akenside, it was *Paradise Lost* that was his more recent inspiration. Akenside's choice of blank verse was an obvious following of Milton's example, and his poetic vocabulary echoed Milton's great work on many significant occasions (Griffin 1986: 110–14). Milton's epic was, of course, itself didactic, its famous aim being to "justify the ways of God to Men." If the ambitions of Akenside's poem turned out to be more secular in many ways, it nevertheless rarely moves far from Milton's influence.

The ambitions of the 23-year old Akenside were recognized by Robert Dodsley, the leading publisher of the day. After submitting the manuscript of *The Pleasures of Imagination* to him, Akenside requested £120 for it. This very considerable sum was agreed upon by Dodsley; no less a figure than Alexander Pope was asked for his opinion of the poem, and is supposed to have looked at the manuscript and remarked that "this was no every-day writer" (Johnson 1905: vol. 3, 412). Akenside's intentions were indeed far from everyday, though he sought to popularize significant ideas from the contemporary intellectual world. *The Pleasures of Imagination* is best described as being "about" aesthetics – a nineteenth-century term for the philosophical understanding of the responses of the mind to beauty. The poem seeks to describe and understand the sources and reasons for imaginative pleasure, though as a blanket statement this is misleading, inasmuch as it is also concerned with many other things: it is, in fact, a poem *about* combining, about the imaginative combinations that result from what is often called an "aesthetic" response to a work of art, or to nature. In very bald terms, Akenside tries to understand aesthetic responses and then combine them into a uniform idea of social virtue as the highest good for the world. Thus loose modern definitions of an "aesthetic" work of literature as implicitly apolitical or asocial rather founder on his central premise in the poem, which is that beauty, truth, and virtue are all naturally linked in the mind, and the world: imaginative pleasure, a natural response to beauty in the human mind, in itself indicates a type of moral judgment, or sense of virtue, and, by showing this natural sense of order in the mind, cannot but be linked to the wider order of the outside world, with its providential nature created for human happiness. To make these very generalized premises more explicit, it is necessary to look briefly at Akenside's immediate sources, and how he implemented them.

The Design of the Poem

Akenside himself attached a "Design" to the poem, which makes much easier the task of working out what philosophical ideas it is necessary to grasp in outline before reading it. His main concern, he tells us, is with "certain powers in human nature which seem to hold a middle place between the organs of bodily sense and the faculties of moral perception" – these are the "Powers of Imagination" (Akenside 1996: 85; italics changed throughout). Akenside then draws on the aesthetic definitions of Joseph Addison in his *Spectator* essays on "The Pleasures of Imagination" (1712), where Addison had defined aesthetic pleasure as the result of the perception of greatness, novelty, or beauty. Akenside links these ideas of pleasure with the philosophy of the third Earl of Shaftesbury, who in the essays gathered in his *Characteristics* (1711) had posited an ideal neoplatonic harmony between man and nature which links the aesthetic and moral, and guarantees virtue through an inherent moral sense. Shaftesbury influenced Francis Hutcheson, the author of the *Inquiry into the Originals of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) and the *Essay on the Nature and*

Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations of the Moral Sense (1728). From Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Akenside took his leading idea of imaginative pleasures being intrinsically linked to a moral and social sense of virtue and benevolence. Akenside follows Hutcheson in arguing that through pleasure we divine a sense of the workings of providence in the design of the world, and that awareness of the eternal truths of such providence lead us to virtue. In summary, Akenside's poem is an attempt to show that imagination is the vital conduit between philosophy (which tries to understand the world) and art (which describes and celebrates it); both are naturally related, in showing the natural benevolence of a world created for the fulfillment of the good, the true, and the beautiful. A concern of Akenside is the separation between art and "science," a term which was at the time moving from the general sense of "knowledge" towards its more specialized modern meaning (Williamson 2000).

If Akenside had stuck to this simplified recipe of topical philosophy, then it is unlikely that the poem would ever have had many readers. It is vital to any appreciation of *The Pleasures of Imagination* that its status as a poem be always remembered. Akenside was not tied to the scholastic confirmation or rebuttal of philosophical conundrums. Instead, he uses the blueprint provided by the ideas of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson to create not a versified philosophical system, but a vibrant, digressive, and at times extremely powerful exemplification of imagination, as opposed to an explication of it. In other words, he makes his poetry become a representation of his theme, and often stops minutely describing his subject, preferring to instance it through examples, allegories, and anecdotes – what he calls "an opportunity to enliven the didactic turn of the poem" (Akenside 1996: 87). In the "Design," he also states quite directly that those seeking detailed philosophical debate should look elsewhere: "the author's aim was not so much to give formal precepts, or enter into the way of direct argumentation, as by exhibiting the most ingaging prospects of nature, to enlarge and harmonize the imagination, and by that means insensibly dispose the minds of men to a similar taste and habit of thinking in religion, morals, and civil life" (Akenside 1996: 88). Such enlargement and harmonization are carried on latently and unconsciously, through enjoyment of the poem. This justification of his own method is extremely useful: rather than apologizing for omissions in his learned subject, or directing the reader to a further course of study, Akenside presents the poem as, foremost, a vessel for the very pleasures it describes. This gives him the imaginative freedom to cover much ground, and gives the reader the confidence to read the poem without having to accept its philosophical veracity.

The first book of the poem is concerned with defining the different sorts of imaginative pleasures, using Addison's categories of the sublime, the wonderful, or the beautiful for what evokes imagination. Akenside is somewhat bashful about the ambition of his poem:

> Yet not unconscious what a doubtful task
> To paint the finest features of the mind,

And to most subtile and mysterious things
Give colour, strength and motion.
(Akenside 1996: i. 45–8)

Indeed, this sense of poetic modesty runs through the first book, intermingling with a very earnest sense of the exploratory powers of the mind that he is describing. The freshness of his poetic enthusiasm is conveyed through the rhythmic suppleness of his blank verse (in the hands of an inferior practitioner, potentially one of the most monotonous of forms). In the following passage, the energy of the poetry, as Akenside answers his own question, leads to the successive running-on of line endings, as (not for the first or last time) he gets carried away with his subject:

Say, why was man so eminently rais'd
Amid the vast creation; why ordain'd
Thro' life and death to dart his piercing eye,
With thoughts beyond the limit of his frame;
But that th' Omnipotent might send him forth
In sight of mortal and immortal pow'rs,
As on a boundless theatre, to run
The great career of justice; to exalt
His gen'rous aim to all diviner deeds;
To chase each partial purpose from his breast;
And thro' the mists of passion and of sense,
And thro' the tossing tide of chance and pain,
To hold his course unfalt'ring, while the voice
Of truth and virtue, up the steep ascent
Of nature, calls him to his high reward,
The applauding smile of heav'n?
(i. 151–66)

Ostensibly, this passage asks: What is the purpose of existence, if not to aspire beyond apparent limits? It is a description of the sublime, that quality which inheres in certain scenes of nature and takes observers out of themselves, to a position of extremes of passion, such as joy or terror, to "thoughts beyond the limit" of their usual experience. Akenside does not detail the sublime but, rather, enacts it through his poetry. Yet even here, the apparently wild and passionate journey through the "boundless theatre" is combined with the voices of "truth" and "virtue," which ensure that the path is not lost. As ever, a supposedly aesthetic reaction is inseparable from an ultimate moral sense of control, order, and divine benevolence.

Pleasures, Perfection, and Politics

Akenside never relates imaginative responses for any value in themselves, but rather because they cohere within the larger benevolent scheme of nature, with its checks and

balances, and this is analogous to the workings of the mind. The enhanced pleasures of a stream to the thirsty, or of perfectly ripened fruit, reflect the internal harmony of the person who enjoys them, showing

> Th' integrity and order of their frame,
> When all is well within, and every end
> Accomplish'd. Thus was beauty sent from heav'n,
> The lovely ministress of truth and good
> In this dark world: for truth and good are one,
> And beauty dwells in them, and they in her,
> With like participation.
>
> (i. 370–6)

Akenside's binding together of "truth" and "good" with "beauty" seems to anticipate Keats's famous conclusion to the "Ode on a Grecian Urn." More immediately significant here is the description of the natural workings of the three concepts, which live together (and, apparently, in each other). This once again binds up the philosophy of the poem: appreciation of beauty is not an isolated act, but part of a linking chain that confirms the virtues of a harmonious, ordered self. That our world is also a "dark world," given Akenside's splendid descriptions of its apparently unlimited benevolence, pulls the reader up a little. Akenside's picture of the divine wisdom of nature seems pantheistic; his metaphoric gestures toward an endless self-improvement reaching for the beautiful and the true are neoplatonic; the world is naturally dark in comparison with the ideal. Such a combination reminds us that he is not offering the sustained and consistent beliefs of a doctrinal treatise. But the darkness of the world also draws attention to Akenside's politics. These were Whiggish, and sometimes republican in sentiment, and have recently been discussed in detail (Griffin 2000; Meehan 1986: 52–63). The part played by politics in *The Pleasures of Imagination* is related to Akenside's quasi-philosophical scheme for human improvement. Like many a "progress" poem of the eighteenth century, Akenside's second book offers at the outset a version of history where the greatest and most fertile relation between human liberty and the arts occurs in ancient Greece, and more specifically in its legacy of republicanism. Furthermore, art can survive only in a condition of liberty (a commonplace, following the Greek writer Longinus' expression of this in his *On the Sublime*). In the supposed dark ages that followed the decline of the classical Greek republics, the absence of civil liberty meant the reduction of artistic freedom. Yet the two are inherently connected, which explains why, for Akenside, the most heightened of passions are often those that respond to apparent liberation from tyranny, such as the death of Julius Caesar; this is compared, favorably, to "planets, suns, and adamantine spheres / Wheeling unshaken thro' the void immense":

> And speak, O man! does this capacious scene
> With half that kindling majesty dilate
> Thy strong conception, as when Brutus rose

Refulgent from the stroke of Cæsar's fate,
Amid the croud of patriots . . .
(i. 488–94)

The anticipated answer to the question is "no": we respond more to the moral sublimity of the death of tyranny than we do to the physical sublimity of looking on the solar system. This is because "Mind, mind alone" offers the highest degree of greatness and beauty of created things and "The living fountains in itself contains / Of beauteous and sublime" (i. 481–3). The mind, being naturally virtuous, is heightened by scenes of virtue, and gravitates toward them. What seems to us questionably subjective is part of Akenside's conviction that imaginative pleasures reflect inner virtue; this, in turn, moves outward, bringing civic virtue to the world.

The binding of imagination with virtue ensures that the politics of the poem do not have to be explicit. What is more important is the poem's explanation of the potential creative power of the mind – a view that at times makes Akenside pay lip-service to his benevolent creator, but at others makes him strikingly modern, with the creativity of the mind going beyond the ostensible theology of the poem and obscuring the deity. The following passage shows the potential for conflict between the two:

For of all
Th' inhabitants of earth, to man alone
Creative wisdom gave to lift his eye
To truth's eternal measures; thence to frame
The sacred laws of action and of will,
Discerning justice from unequal deeds,
And temperance from folly. But beyond
This energy of truth, whose dictates bind
Assenting reason, the benignant sire,
To deck the honour'd paths of just and good,
Has added bright imagination's rays:
Where virtue rising from the awful depth
Of truth's mysterious bosom, doth forsake
The unadorn'd condition of her birth;
And dress'd by fancy in ten thousand hues,
Assumes a various feature, to attract,
With charms responsive to each gazer's eye,
The hearts of men.
(i. 537–54)

"Creative wisdom" works for "truth," making sure that "sacred laws" are kept in the checks and balances of human conduct. But then "virtue" rises from the uncharted territories of "truth's mysterious bosom," and is dressed in a multitude of outfits by the imagination. This seems another reiteration of the bond that joins all these essential qualities in the poem, yet the potential is there for "each gazer's eye" to make

something different of the imagination, or to lose sight of the virtue that is hidden underneath, perhaps to the contradiction of the wishes of reason, that "benignant sire." In other words, Akenside's vision of the workings of the universal human mind contains within it evidence of the striking individuality with which the imagination actually works. It is worth considering what happens when this supposedly natural equality between imagination and virtue is questioned further.

Providence, Pleasure, and Virtue

The clearest example of such questioning is the extended allegory that takes up much of the second book of Akenside's poem. Its purpose, broadly speaking, is to reconcile the pleasures of passion with virtue, by means of the vision of Harmodius, presented as an ancient seer (the name is that of a famous Athenian tyrant-killer from the sixth century BCE). A horrible vision leads Harmodius to question divine providence:

> Gracious heav'n!
> What is the life of man? Or cannot these,
> Not these portents thy awful will suffice?
> That propagated thus beyond their scope,
> They rise to act their cruelties anew
> In my afflicted bosom, thus decreed
> The universal sensitive of pain,
> The wretched heir of evils not its own!
> (ii. 212–19)

It is a familiar lament, seeking explanations for suffering and evil in a supposedly providential universe. On the other hand, of course, providence is a guide to human fulfillment, rather than a guarantee of it. Divine wisdom rebukes Harmodius not on such technical terms, however, but for having the temerity to question at all:

> Vain are thy thoughts, O child of mortal birth,
> And impotent thy tongue. Is thy short span
> Capacious of this universal frame?
> Thy wisdom all-sufficient? Thou, alas!
> Dost thou aspire to judge between the lord
> Of nature and his works? To lift thy voice
> Against the sov'reign order he decreed
> All good and lovely? to blaspheme the bands
> Of tenderness innate and social love . . .
> (ii. 242–50)

The literary model here is one of the most influential of all the books of the Old Testament – the end of the Book of Job, where God answers the unjustly suffering Job from out of a storm, in words distinctly uncomfortable to a modern ear:

> Would you discredit my justice?
> Would you condemn me to justify yourself?
> Do you have an arm like God's,
> And can your voice thunder like his?
> (Job 40: 8–9)

This stark refusal to discuss the matter, and the resulting bluntness of the nature of faith, is softened in Akenside's poem through the allegory, where a youth is offered a choice between female personifications of beautiful Pleasure (called Euphrosyné) and the less striking but no less beautiful Virtue. He is, fortunately, eventually allowed both – but only after a false start where (in a clear, less Christian recapitulation of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*), he tilts towards Pleasure at Virtue's expense, and is accordingly admonished:

> By that bland light, the young unpractis'd views
> Of reason wander thro' a fatal road,
> Far from their native aim: as if to lye
> Inglorious in the fragrant shade, and wait
> The soft access of ever-circling joys,
> Were all the end of being.
> (ii. 554–9)

The balance thus corrected, Harmodius is told that the allegory has proven his questionings vain:

> There let thy soul acknowledge its complaint
> How blind, how impious! There behold the ways
> Of heav'n's eternal destiny to man,
> For ever just, benevolent and wise . . .
> (ii. 669–72)

The degree to which the rather obscure allegory proves any such thing is more doubtful to a reader detached from the optimism of Akenside's poem: the nature of suffering, for instance, is not explained so much as explained away by the contention that unpleasant feelings are as necessary as pleasures, as the divine voice continues:

> Need I urge
> Thy tardy thought through all the various round
> Of this existence, that thy soft'ning soul
> At length may learn what energy the hand
> Of virtue mingles in the bitter tide

Of passion swelling with distress and pain,
To mitigate the sharp with gracious drops
Of cordial pleasure?

(ii. 676–83)

For many readers, the thought would indeed have to be urged: the idea that passions both pleasurable and painful are corrected and equaled by the workings of virtue does not emerge as naturally as an explanation of human experience as this suggests; as optimism it seems somewhat facile, even if it is (necessarily) of a piece with the larger argument of the poem, in favor of nature's benevolence. The third book of the poem takes these ideas down a different road, by describing human weakness more directly, in the form of folly.

Ridicule, "Truth," and Memory

Akenside's argument about the place of folly in the responses that make up the imagination is far simpler than the opaque allegory of the second book. He details six different types of folly, the sharp distinction of which is not as important as the general idea they all represent – that of imaginative self-deception:

Another tribe succeeds; deluded long
By fancy's dazling optics, these behold
The images of some peculiar things
With brighter hues resplendent, and portray'd
With features nobler far than e'er adorn'd
Their genuine objects.

(iii. 152–7)

The lack of subjectivity here leads, in the twenty-first century, to all sorts of questions: What is meant by folly, when it is only in the eye of the beholder? Is not folly constructed by the individual (in which case it cannot be described as immutable and universal)? If the imagination dazzles one person into self-delusion, may it not do the same for everybody? In Akenside's attempt to make his scheme cohere, however, such questions are beside the point: folly, and the ridicule it produces, are of great use, because (in an idea borrowed from the third Earl of Shaftesbury), ridicule serves as a "test of truth." In other words, if any idea is true, it cannot be ridiculed; if false, ridicule serves to expose it. Ridicule is thus tied in with the providential workings of the mind:

Ask we for what fair end, th' almighty sire
In mortal bosoms wakes this gay contempt,
These grateful stings of laughter, from disgust
Educing pleasure? Wherefore, but to aid

The tardy steps of reason, and at once
By this prompt impulse urge us to depress
The giddy aims of folly?
(iii. 259–65)

Abstract principles do not always work well in practice: Akenside's following of this theory raised more questions than it answered, and involved him in controversy with one of the most notorious arguficrs of the age, the scholar and theologian William Warburton. As has been shown, the controversy was not to Akenside's intellectual advantage (Terry 2000). The "ridicule" of one person did indeed turn out to be the "truth" of another; consequently, this part of the poem offers character types that have poetic effect, but lack conviction in the philosophical justification of their purpose.

Akenside returns to the question of truth in the passages following the discussion of ridicule, tracing the different types of imaginative sympathy that lead ideas, scenes, and feelings to be recalled, partly through Lockean association, but also through the workings of memory. When discussing memory, Akenside both makes clear his own poetic individuality and looks forward to more well-known poetic debates. Memory contains

The seal of nature. There alone unchang'd,
Her form remains. The balmy walks of May
There breathe perennial sweets: the trembling chord
Resounds for ever in th' abstracted ear,
Melodious: and the virgin's radiant eye,
Superior to disease, to grief, and time,
Shines with unbating lustre.
(iii. 367–73)

As well as showing the importance of the emergent idea of nostalgia in the midcentury (in poems such as Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," written two years before), this brings to mind the "still unravished" perfection of Keats's Grecian urn: memory is inviolate, and cannot be defaced. And yet, the idea of its being removed from potential change and harm reminds us, perhaps, of the world where the seal is broken, bringing back the harsher side of reality that Akenside so often covers over in his benign world, a world which loses its lustre through change, decay, and (ultimately) death.

Imagination, Creativity, and Divinity

To say as much is to recognize that *The Pleasures of Imagination* posits a world of beauty and truth, not in naïve ignorance of the absence of such ideals from the lives of most people, but rather in the firm belief that the powers of the human mind are so great as to enable the problems of existence to be solved. At times, as I have suggested,

this seems facile, and far removed from the more immediate difficulties of life; but Akenside's is not an aloof, removed position, and his purpose is to find meaning in this world. His most considerable argument, as he moves toward a conclusion, follows the logic of asking why, if the purpose of the world is not beneficent, is nature so obviously generous and beautiful?

> But were not nature still indow'd at large
> With all which life requires, tho' unadorn'd
> With such inchantment? Wherefore then her form
> So exquisitely fair? her breath perfum'd
> With such æthereal sweetness? whence her voice
> Inform'd at will to raise or to depress
> Th' impassion'd soul? and whence the robes of light
> Which thus invest her with more lovely pomp
> Than fancy can describe? Whence but from thee,
> O source divine of ever-flowing love,
> And thy unmeasur'd goodness?
> (iii. 479–89)

This is of a piece with such guides to eighteenth-century optimism as Pope's *Essay on Man*, being a part of a larger debate that is counterpointed by examples of nature being either uncaring, or actively malevolent: the late poems of William Cowper in the 1790s, such as "Yardley Oak," or "The Castaway," offer a very different version of "nature" from Akenside's beatific vision.

But it is the beauty and virtue of nature, as perceived through the imagination, that form Akenside's main subject: to this he returns, and the end of his poem is a recapitulation of how the harmony of natural scenes affects us:

> th' attentive mind,
> By this harmonious action on her pow'rs,
> Becomes herself harmonious: wont so oft
> In outward things to meditate the charm
> Of sacred order, soon she seeks at home
> To find a kindred order, to exert
> Within herself this elegance of love,
> This fair-inspir'd delight: her temper'd pow'rs
> Refine at length, and every passion wears
> A chaster, milder, more attractive mien.
> (iii. 599–608)

We see here a similarity to the "dark invisible workmanship" that empowers and controls the mind in Wordsworth's *Prelude* (like Coleridge, Wordsworth was very familiar with Akenside's poetry). Passions are tempered and chastened in this mental spring-clean, and if there is something rather frigid in such refinement of

the mental powers, it is counterweighted by the genuine sense of self-fulfillment that Akenside ascribes to the imaginative capacity. Indeed, this is, in many ways, his most enduring legacy – to read *The Pleasures of Imagination* is to come up against the most enthusiastic poetic adherent of the possibilities of mental pleasure. At the poem's very end, Akenside's breathless approach looks forward, with their imaginative response to the world making humans the potential creative center of things:

> all declare
> For what th' eternal maker has ordain'd
> The pow'rs of man: we feel within ourselves
> His energy divine: he tells the heart,
> He meant, he made us to behold and love
> What he beholds and loves, the general orb
> Of life and being; to be great like him,
> Beneficent and active. Thus the men
> Whom nature's works can charm, with God himself
> Hold converse; grow familiar, day by day,
> With his conceptions, act upon his plan;
> And form to his, the relish of their souls.
> (iii. 622–33)

For all the Miltonic echoes, this is a new vision of possible perfectibility, where the role of God is capable of emulation – the "powers of man" mean that they can "be great like him." Considering the "aesthetic" question of imaginative pleasure has become a way of the world reaching up to (and becoming like) God. As so often in the poem, the notional attention to the divine is mixed with a sentiment more secular and pantheistic. Akenside's ambition of combining the different sorts of imaginative response with the true and the virtuous is fulfilled, in this utopian vision.

The fate of Akenside's poem is easy enough to understand: read for so long by so many, it became, in a more specialized world, with a growth in the academic study of aesthetics, an example of an apparently outmoded form of writing. There were still reprints of *The Pleasures of Imagination* up to the 1890s, yet it is not surprising that, amid the interest in creative subjectivity that followed the canonization of Wordsworth in the later nineteenth century, Akenside's poetry should seem dry in comparison, or that he was subject to the same denigration as Dryden and Pope. Freed from such period-prejudices, Akenside's poem has a lot to offer the modern reader. It represents an entirely different (and apparently naïve) attempt to understand the workings of the mind (and therefore the world) in poetic terms; in an age of overspecialization and insistent, restrictive, and evaluative definitions of the types of work we should find in the past, it is an eccentric, digressive, sometimes obscure but equally inspiring corrective. It remains a unique poem, sometimes bemusing, sometimes wonderful, and is no less valuable for its peculiarities than for its genuine poetic achievement.

See also chs. 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"; 6, "Poetry and the Visual Arts"; 25, "Rhyming Couplets and Blank Verse"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics"; 36, "The Pleasures and Perils of the Imagination"; 37, "The Sublime."

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18
Samuel Johnson, *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

David F. Venturo

Samuel Johnson's *London* (1738) and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) are both late manifestations of the genre of the poetic imitation, which flourished for approximately a century from 1650 to 1750. The imitation was related to translation, but its poetics were looser and more flexible. The poet would take a classical (or occasionally a contemporary foreign) poem, and, instead of adhering closely to the language of the original, update it with modern, local parallels. As John Oldham explained in the "Advertisement" to his imitation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, published in 1681, he had striven to put his poet into "a more modern dress, . . . by making him speak, as if he were living, and writing now. I therefore resolv'd to alter the Scene from *Rome* to *London*, and to make use of *English* names of Men, Places, and Customs, where the Parallel would decently permit" (Oldham 1987: 87). The poetic imitation was first attempted in English in the 1650s and 1660s by Abraham Cowley and Sir John Denham, who were following trends in contemporary French literature. In the 1670s and 1680s, the imitation was refined and popularized in England by such poets as John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and the above-mentioned Oldham. In 1680 John Dryden memorably described imitation as a "libertine" form of translation, counterbalanced by metaphrase, strict word-for-word rendering, at the opposite extreme, with paraphrase, "Translation with Latitude," occupying the middle ground between the other two (Dryden 1961: vol. 1, 117, 114). As a poet, Dryden claimed to prefer the moderate paraphrase, although as a playwright, his imitations of Shakespeare and Sophocles significantly diverge from the original plays, and many of his paraphrastic poetic translations – especially those written after he was stripped of his laureateship in 1689, in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution – border on imitation. The extended historical conceit or parallel remained the central feature of the genre from Cowley and Denham through Pope, and Johnson's reservations about such conceits or parallels helped spell the end of such imitations. [*See* ch. 33, "The Classical Inheritance."]

The two poems under discussion, Samuel Johnson's imitations of Juvenal's Third and Tenth Satires, were written in what would prove to be the closing years of the

genre's hundred-year lifespan. Yet at the time Johnson wrote *London*, in the late 1730s, few would have predicted that the imitation would have run its course little more than a decade later. Indeed, in the 1730s the poetic imitation enjoyed its greatest popularity and critical acclaim, thanks to Alexander Pope, who produced nine imitations of selected satires and epistles by the Roman poet Horace. Pope brilliantly exploited historical parallels between Augustan Rome and his own London to create ironic contrasts between the political and cultural achievements of the classical past and the political corruption and cultural decadence of the world of King George II and his Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, as part of a coordinated attack on the Court and administration.

Johnson's *London* is very much a political poem, conceived in the spirit of Pope's brilliant *Imitations of Horace* and John Dryden's great translations of Juvenal and Persius (1692), which offered veiled, ventriloquized criticism of the Whiggish, Williamite world of the 1690s. *London* captures much of the spirit of its classical original, Juvenal's Third Satire, but with a twist. Juvenal aims his satire primarily at social and cultural targets. The main speaker in that poem, a figure named Umbricius, fulminates against the breakdown of traditional social and economic bonds between wealthy Roman patrons and their dependants, sometimes called clients, which makes it impossible for a Roman citizen of modest means to continue to live in the great city. Instead, Umbricius complains, he is compelled to flee to the countryside, while Rome is flooded by Greek sycophants and crass *nouveaux riches* who enjoy the doles and perquisites that once were given by patrons to men, such as himself, of old Roman stock. Johnson transforms Juvenal's cultural critique into a poem that is primarily a political satire, focusing on the corruption of the court of King George II and the administration of Sir Robert Walpole, with only ancillary attention to the dangers and indignities of city life.

Johnson's poem relies on the discourse, and is informed by the political agenda, of the "Patriot" opposition to Sir Robert Walpole, which reached its peak in the late 1730s and early 1740s [*see* ch. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"]. The chief organ for the opposition was the newspaper *The Craftsman*, the *éminence grise* behind which was Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1677–1751), friend of Pope and Swift and northern secretary of state under Queen Anne. Having been attainted by the Whig majority in Parliament in 1714 and ejected from the House of Lords, Bolingbroke fled England and became adviser and secretary to the pretender to the British throne, James Stuart. Partially pardoned in 1723, Bolingbroke returned to England in 1725 and attempted to forge a new "Country" party designed to transcend traditional Whig–Tory divisions by appealing to both moderate Whigs and moderate Tories through its criticism of the corruption of the Walpole administration (Kramnick 1968). As political leader of the "Court" party, Walpole was guilty, in Bolingbroke's opinion, of using patronage to destroy the traditional balance of power between the legislative and executive branches of British government. In particular, according to Bolingbroke and other Country adherents, Walpole had damaged the so-called Ancient Constitution of Britain by undermining what they regarded as

the traditional role of Parliament as supervisor of the executive. Since the 1690s, they contended, the rise of new commercial interests had put enormous wealth at the disposal of the central government through new institutions such as the Bank of England. Bolingbroke and his supporters feared that this wealth, in the hands of the executive, subjected Parliament, as never before, to the influence of the Crown and its administration. Bolingbroke regarded this influence as *corruption*, exercised through the distribution of pensions, places, and other forms of patronage that could be used to purchase cooperation with the policies of the king and his chief minister. As J. G. A. Pocock has remarked, such influence was used to create support for "measures – standing armies, national debts, excise schemes – whereby the activities of administration gr[e]w beyond Parliament's control" (Pocock 1989: 125). Such corruption, Bolingbroke and his allies charged, encouraged dependency and undermined the traditional British love of liberty. It could be countered by adopting legislation and pursuing policies and practices – such as regular, frequent, free elections and the expulsion of placemen from Parliament – that would keep members of Parliament from falling under the sway of the administration. Country politicians recognized the legitimacy of administration as a governmental activity, but they regarded the power accrued by administration as dangerous because it could easily encroach on personal freedom. Hence, according to Country supporters, the parliamentary duty to supervise administration and to preserve the independence of persons and property took precedence over the administrative power to govern (Pocock 1989: 124–5).

Just how powerfully *London* embodied Bolingbroke's Country agenda and rhetoric is reflected in comments written by Sir John Hawkins, Johnson's friend and biographer, who supported Walpole and the Court party in the 1730s:

> The topics of [*London*], so far as it respects this country, or the time when it was written, are evidently drawn from those weekly publications, which, to answer the view of a malevolent faction, first created, and for some years supported, a distinction between the interests of the government and the people, under the several denominations of the court and the country parties: these publications were carried on under the direction of men, professing themselves to be [Opposition] [W]higs and friends of the people, in a paper intitled, "The Country Journal or the Craftsman." (Hawkins 1787: 60)

The political nature and agenda of the poem are borne out by the timing of its publication, by Robert Dodsley, on Wednesday, May 10, 1738, just three days before he published Alexander Pope's opposition satire, *One Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty-Eight, Dialogue One*. A skillful businessman and opposition supporter, Dodsley probably hoped that these poems would boost each other's sales and further the Country party goal of turning public opinion against Walpole.

The structure of *London* is built on a series of stark contrasts derived from Juvenal's Third Satire, but reinforced and modified by the political concerns and rhetoric of the Country party: city versus country, wealth versus poverty, danger versus safety, servitude versus freedom, corruption versus honesty, present versus past. In particular,

the poem is constructed around recurring temporal and spatial contrasts that reflect the Country ideology and agenda to which Johnson passionately subscribed in the 1730s and early 1740s.

The poem, written in lively, end-stopped heroic couplets, begins with a 34-line proem spoken by a young, unnamed friend of the poem's chief character, Thales, who is about to leave London for self-imposed exile in the Welsh countryside. The two friends stand on the banks of the Thames, in Greenwich, awaiting the "Wherry" (l. 19) that will carry Thales and the "small Remains" of his "dissipated Wealth" (l. 20) on his journey. Both men are noticeably upset: the friend refers to his own mixed emotions of "Grief and Fondness" (l. 1) at the impending departure, and he characterizes Thales as "Indignant" (l. 34) and "contemptuous" (l. 33). As the friend approvingly explains, Thales is "Resolv'd at length, from Vice and London far, / To breathe in distant Fields a purer Air" (ll. 5–6). As the hendiadys in line 5 makes clear, for Thales and his friend, "Vice" and *London* have become synonymous, and thus no refuge is possible for a virtuous man within the city limits. Suddenly, in the midst of this turmoil, the friends experience a brief but powerful interlude, prompted by a recollection that Greenwich is the birthplace of Queen Elizabeth I. They perform an act of reverence that leads to a quasi-religious, visionary moment during which they

> kneel, and kiss the consecrated Earth;
> In pleasing Dreams the blissful Age renew,
> And call Britannia's Glories back to view;
> Behold her Cross triumphant on the Main,
> The Guard of Commerce, and the Dread of *Spain*,
> Ere Masquerades debauch'd, Excise oppress'd,
> Or *English* Honour grew a standing Jest.
> A transient Calm the happy Scenes bestow,
> And for a Moment lull the Sense of Woe.
> (ll. 24–32)

The interlude epitomizes themes, motifs, and rhetorical strategies that characterize the 263 lines of the poem: fierce anger at England's present-day moral, military, and political weakness and corruption; nostalgia for the military and political glory of the British past, encapsulated in the reference to Elizabeth (and to references later in the poem to Henry V, Edward III, and Alfred the Great); and an assertion that England once had been singled out for God's blessing and is now an object of divine wrath. These things are, of course, also part of the shared discourse of the opposition to Walpole. The allusion to Queen Elizabeth and the blue-water policies of the Elizabethan navy as a means of ridiculing Robert Walpole's diplomatic efforts to avoid war with France and Spain would have been familiar to readers of *The Craftsman* and other opposition papers. Complaints about cultural decadence imported from France and Italy – "Masquerades" – and anger over Walpole's tax proposals – "Excise" (both l. 29) – were also familiar elements of the opposition agenda. In addition, the focus in the proem on Wales, as Thales's destination, also reflects Johnson's political agenda,

since Wales was the home of Elizabeth's Tudor family and a nation that traditionally enjoyed a reputation for being fiercely independent.

The remainder of the poem, lines 35–263, consists of a lengthy, rhetorically sophisticated speech by Thales elaborating the reasons for his decision to leave London. His rhetoric relies heavily on the language and conventions of seventeenth-century jeremiad: he describes the walls of London as "curst" and the city as "devote" – i.e. damned or doomed – to "Vice and Gain" (l. 37). Like a harried ascetic, Thales prays for sanctuary from this corruption: "Grant me, kind Heaven, to find some happier Place, / Where Honesty and Sense are no Disgrace . . . / Some secret Cell, ye Pow'rs, indulgent give" (ll. 43–4, 49). He also implies that the current outbreak of public corruption is providentially sanctioned, an act of heavenly retribution for English misdeeds: "To such, a groaning Nation's spoils are giv'n, / When publick Crimes inflame the Wrath of Heav'n" (ll. 65–6).

Throughout his diatribe, Thales hammers home the theme of commercial corruption in contemporary London. Indeed, in line 37 he goes so far as to equate "Vice and Gain," as though it has become impossible to earn an honest living in the city. "Worth" (l. 35) and "Virtue" (ll. 63, 145) are no longer synonymous there, the moral signification of "Worth" having been obliterated by a commercial code that sanctions deception, betrayal, "Perjury" (l. 68), and "Theft" (l. 68). Most tellingly, Thales complains that the moral bonds between patrons and clients have become meaningless in Walpole's world. Now, the wealthy patronize only those whose testimony could impeach them: "For what but social Guilt the Friend endears? / Who shares *Orgilio*'s Crimes, his Fortune shares" (ll. 83–4). London has become a city of moral inversion and perversion, a theme reinforced by the elaborate balances and antitheses of Johnson's heroic couplets. Thus, as Thales explains in his opening remarks (ll. 35–60), Walpolian "Pensions" (l. 51) have corrupted members of Parliament so far as to vote a "Patriot," such as the attainted Bolingbroke, "black," and a "Courtier white" (l. 52). Similarly, they have undermined British heroism and love of freedom by encouraging pacifism in the face of military insults and piratic depredations by the French and Spanish. If traditional British sea power is a victim of Walpole's polices, so is traditional British culture: effeminate opera – "warbling Eunuchs" (l. 59) – has usurped the cultural place of English theater, which no longer enjoys free expression, but instead is restricted – "licens'd" – (l. 59) by the government. Opera, in turn, according to Thales, serves Walpole's agenda by promoting mindless "Servitude" (l. 60) among its audiences.

In the longest section of his speech, lines 91–157, Thales xenophobically bemoans the threat from French émigrés. Based on Juvenal's lengthy attack on Greek émigrés in the Third Satire, Johnson, in alternating verse paragraphs, contrasts the truth-bending hypocrisy of the "supple *Gaul*" (l. 124) with the inflexible rectitude of the "*true Briton*" (l. 8), congenitally incapable of lying. Thales's complaints against French émigrés were, of course, greatly exaggerated. London in the 1720s and 1730s was less of a magnet for immigrants than imperial Rome in the late first century CE. Indeed, the most notable French migration – of Protestant Huguenots – had taken place

several decades earlier, following Louis XIV's persecution of Protestants after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, and these artisans were hardly the insidious flatterers described by Thales. Nevertheless, Johnson's attack on French immigrants provided him with a publicly and politically acceptable means of criticizing Walpole and George II for their decision to ally the nation during the 1730s with the French Bourbons rather than its traditional Austrian Habsburg allies. It also provided a symbol and a scapegoat for what Johnson and his Country allies regarded as the moral corruption of English culture under Walpole and George.

To illustrate the perversion of patronage, Thales recounts, in lines 194–209, the story of Orgilio, whose name in French means *proud*, and who is almost certainly an allegorical representation of Sir Robert Walpole. The episode is based on a similar one in lines 212–22 of Juvenal's Third Satire. When Orgilio's "Palace" (l. 195) burns to the ground, his clients, who owe their powerful and lucrative positions in church and state to bribes they paid their great patron, "Refund the Plunder of the begger'd Land" (l. 201) by redirecting some of their wealth to help finance the rebuilding. By contrast, Thales complains, when a poor man's lodgings burn, "all neglect, and most insult [his] Woes" (l. 193). Like Johnson's attack on French émigrés, this section of the poem was historically inaccurate, as its author would admit later in life. "This was by [Charles] Hitch a bookseller" – one of the publishers of *Voyage to Abyssinia* and the *Plan of a Dictionary* – "justly remarked to be no picture of modern manners, though it might be true of Rome," Johnson noted in the margins of a personal copy of the poem (Johnson 1982: 199). But in 1738 Johnson was less interested in the accuracy of his historical parallels than in making a point about the dangers of political corruption.

As *London* builds to its close, Johnson takes on his most imposing subject of all, as Thales attacks the morals of George II (ll. 242–7), criticizing the King for his annual spring voyages to Hanover to renew his adulterous liaison with Sophie von Wallmoden, and glancing at George's preference – which did not go down well in England – for his Hanoverian principality over his British kingdom. In recent years, this criticism of George has been construed by some critics and historians as a sign that Johnson had Jacobite sympathies; but because opposition and Jacobite discourse overlapped in so many ways, including a willingness sharply to criticize the King personally, it is impossible to determine from his published works to what extent Johnson might have harbored Jacobitical sentiments and what role they might have played in the shaping of the poem (Erskine-Hill 1996; Gerrard 1994: 232).

The Vanity of Human Wishes, Johnson's most powerful and important poem, and his first work to appear with his name on the title-page, was published eleven years after *London*, on Monday, January 9, 1749. This imitation of Juvenal is very different from Johnson's first, the angry rhetoric and political propaganda of *London* replaced by a more sober rhetoric and serious philosophical purpose. These differences reflect changes in Johnson's circumstances and outlook between 1738 and 1749, but also the very different rhetoric and purpose of Juvenal's Third and Tenth Satires. In the Tenth Satire, Juvenal abandoned the angry invective of his earlier poems for a rhetorically more elevated form of philosophical satire which he uses to explore the irony of the

relation of human happiness to human desires. Because our passions dominate our reason, he argues, we rarely understand what is good for us. Indeed, in the opening lines of the poem, he wryly claims that the gods, to punish us, grant our wishes. After surveying the five chief categories of wishes – for political power, rhetorical eloquence, military glory, long life, and physical beauty – Juvenal offers a solution to this problem: If you must pray, ask for a sound mind in a healthy body; for indifference to death; and, most important of all, for freedom from the turmoil of passion. Consistent with classical Stoic doctrine, Juvenal's narrator concludes by urging human beings to rely on themselves, not the gods, for their happiness. It is human beings, themselves, he charges, who, by failing to exercise emotional self-control, foolishly surrender their autonomy to the pseudo-divinity, Fortune.

In length and structure, *The Vanity of Human Wishes* closely follows Juvenal's Tenth Satire. At 368 lines, *The Vanity* is only two longer than Juvenal's Tenth, a remarkable achievement considering the density of Juvenal's Latin. (By contrast, Dryden's translation of Juvenal's Tenth is 561 lines long.) In its structure, *The Vanity* is virtually identical to Juvenal's poem: a brief introduction on the dangers of improvident wishing is followed by a long series of exempla divided into the same five categories that Juvenal used and presented so as to suggest comprehensiveness. In its informing philosophical/religious perspective, however, *The Vanity of Human Wishes* could hardly be more different from Juvenal's Tenth. Indeed, in this imitation Johnson wrote such a vigorous rejoinder to Juvenal's classical argument for philosophical detachment and self-sufficiency that it practically spelled the end of the poetic imitation as a viable genre.

Juvenal's poem, especially its conclusion, is informed by the virtues of the two great classical philosophical schools, Stoicism and Epicureanism. Although these two schools were obviously quite distinct, they shared, as Isobel Grundy has thoughtfully explained, one important feature: both put a premium on the importance of emotional detachment and human self-sufficiency as central to a virtuous life (Grundy 1986: 165). By contrast, Johnson drew on Pauline, Christian tradition, believing that those very passions that Juvenal sought to eradicate in the service of reason could be educated and put to use, along with reason, in the service of faith. This tradition, which profoundly shaped both Johnson's religious perspective and his literary imagination, can be described as *fideist*.

Fideism, as Blanford Parker defines it, "exists whenever God is perceived as an absence. This is not to say that God is perceived as not existing, but rather that His empirical (and sometimes moral) absence from the world seems to be strong proof of His presence in another" (Parker 1998: 190). This is the religious perspective that informs a number of Johnson's favorite books: the biblical Book of Ecclesiastes and St. Paul's Epistles; Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*; John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*; and William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. In Ecclesiastes, for example, the argument for God's existence is premised on his conspicuous absence from events in the mundane world. Only after the narrator of Ecclesiastes has demonstrated the apparent lack of divine order in the world does he assert: "Fear God, and keep his

commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (12: 13). Law's *Serious Call*, which, as Boswell famously noted, profoundly affected the development of Johnson's mature religious sensibility, is also fideist in its perspective. As Johnson explained to Boswell, he was a "lax *talker* against religion" as an Oxford undergraduate until he met his match in Law (Boswell 1934: vol. 1, 68). Law, like the narrator of Ecclesiastes, urges his readers to cultivate faith in a hidden God who lies behind the seeming randomness and meaninglessness of ordinary events. He assures his readers that the mundane world offers only "shadows of joy and happiness" in contrast to the joyous substance of the divine realm (Law 1906: 133).

Fideism also helps to give structure to *The Vanity of Human Wishes* – a structure it shares with Ecclesiastes and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as well as Juvenal's Tenth Satire. In these texts, a narrator takes the reader on an extended survey of the world in order to demonstrate its theological emptiness. The survey culminates in a turn, leading to a brief, taut conclusion that provides to that emptiness an answer which lies outside the mundane order. Just when life appears to be most futile and empty, the divine presence rushes in to console the longing and faithful soul. From a historical perspective, fideism also provides an organizing principle. Just as the emptiness of the mundane world hides a loving God, so the apparent randomness of historical events masks the guiding hand of Providence. Thus, because our human perspective is limited, worldly events seem random and disordered; but from God's perspective outside of time, human history follows an intelligible plot. This point is central to the argument of another of Johnson's favorite fideist works, Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*.

The opening paragraphs (ll. 1–72) of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* beautifully articulate the problem of human wishing. Because "Reason [rarely] guides the stubborn Choice" (l. 11) and "Hope and Fear, Desire and Hate, / O'erspread with Snares the clouded Maze of Fate" (ll. 5–6), human beings suffer from a severely limited and distorted perspective on themselves and the surrounding world that leads to self-inflicted anguish. By presenting the problem in this fashion, Johnson seems to ally himself with the philosophical rationalism of Juvenal's Tenth Satire and with the popular neo-Epicureanism of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester's *A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind* (1679) and Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man* (1733–4), as well as the classical Epicureanism of Rochester's and Pope's great Roman source, Lucretius' philosophical poem *De Rerum Natura*. But Johnson establishes this alliance only so that he can shatter it spectacularly in his conclusion (ll. 343–68). Above the figure of purblind "wav'ring Man" stands "Observation" (l. 1), which enjoys an Olympian perspective that allows it to survey humanity "from *China* to *Peru*" (l. 2) – that is, as though looking from one end of a Mercator projection map to the other. Observation is seconded by the figure of "Hist'ry" (l. 29). Together, these two provide a comprehensive survey through space and time of the dangers of short-sighted wishing.

Johnson satirically surveys, following Juvenal, the speciousness of five kinds of wishes: for political power (ll. 73–134); achievements in learning (ll. 135–74); military glory (ll. 175–254); longevity (ll. 255–318); and physical beauty (ll. 319–42). Major exempla, most of them historical, of approximately 15 to 30 lines each, are supported

by shorter exempla and brief historical references. For example, in satirizing those who pursue political power, Johnson buttresses the central exemplum of Cardinal Wolsey (ll. 99–128) with brief allusions to the unfortunate careers of George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham; Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford; Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford; and Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon (ll. 129–31). Johnson reserves his most powerful satire for the pursuers of military glory: Charles XII of Sweden, celebrated in many eighteenth-century circles for his bravery and piety, is grimly mocked for selectively bridling the emotions of "Love" and "Fear" (l. 195) while giving full rein to his ambition for military conquest (ll. 202–4). Such blinkered judgment, Johnson wryly notes, transformed the once feared king into Fortune's fool during his lifetime and reduced him after death into a mere theme for moralists and writers.

Johnson constructs his five surveys to make them seem as comprehensive as possible. For example, in satirizing military vainglory, Johnson's exempla range diachronically from the Persian general Xerxes, who lived in the fifth century BCE, to Charles Albert, Elector of Bavaria, who died in 1745, less than four years before *The Vanity* was published. Other groups of exempla organized synchronically also suggest comprehensiveness. Under the vanity of wishing for achievements in learning, Johnson tellingly links Thomas Lydiat (l. 164), Galileo Galilei (l. 164), and Archbishop William Laud (ll. 165–74): historical contemporaries, all of whom died tragically in the 1640s. Lydiat, although eminent in mathematical circles, was virtually unknown outside them; Galileo, of course, was one of the most eminent scientists of the European Renaissance; and Laud rose to become Archbishop of Canterbury and a close adviser to King Charles I. Yet, despite their scholarly accomplishments, all died in anguished circumstances in the 1640s after being persecuted by political and religious enemies – the well-connected Laud and the renowned Galileo as well as the obscure and impoverished Lydiat. Indeed, in the case of Laud, his connections to monarchical power directly led to his judicial murder by Act of Parliament in 1645. Finally, Johnson emphasizes comprehensiveness by using gendered exempla, in contrast to Juvenal's purely masculine focus. Under military vainglory, Maria Theresa of Austria outwits, politically and militarily, Charles Albert, Elector of Bavaria (ll. 241–54). In addition, Johnson alters the gender from male to female of the exempla who ironically suffer the consequences of physical beauty (ll. 318–42). Indeed, by the time the reader reaches the end of the survey at line 342, he or she has been overwhelmed by a heartbreakingly exhaustive network of exempla.

Then, at line 343 of *The Vanity*, a remarkable turn occurs, as Johnson definitively parts company with his Juvenalian model. No sooner does the survey end with the implication that all wishes are unsafe, than an emotional voice demurs in a tumultuous six-line outburst:

> Where then shall Hope and Fear their Objects find?
> Must dull Suspence corrupt the stagnant Mind?
> Must helpless Man, in Ignorance sedate,
> Roll darkling down the Torrent of his Fate?

> Must no Dislike alarm, no Wishes rise,
> No Cries invoke the Mercies of the Skies?
>
> (ll. 343–8)

Must we surrender, the voice complains, to Juvenal's dismal ideal of emotional resignation, paradoxically both torpid and torrential? The very fervor with which this voice speaks mocks the possibility of Juvenal's rational escape from desire. Immediately, this voice is answered by the consoling words of a second: "Enquirer, cease, Petitions yet remain, / Which Heav'n may hear, nor deem Religion vain" (ll. 349–50). Religion offers the potential of a safe harbor from vain wishing, although the voice makes no guarantees ("which Heav'n *may* hear"). The consoling voice urges humanity: "Still raise for Good the supplicating Voice, / But leave to Heav'n the Measure and the Choice" (ll. 351–2). Because hope and fear are ineradicably part of the human psyche, Johnson recognizes that these emotions must be tempered by education rather than repressed. Thus, the consoling voice advises:

> when the Sense of sacred Presence fires,
> And strong Devotion to the Skies aspires,
> Pour forth thy Fervours for a healthful Mind,
> Obedient Passions, and a Will resign'd.
>
> (ll. 357–60)

That is, when your passions dictate that you must pray for something, pray fervently for the capacity wisely to manage your fervent desires. This activity is brilliantly circular and transforms the objects sought from products into a *process*. The act of prayer is conceived by Johnson as something not cool and detached, but warm and fiery, and becomes its own end. In this way the narrator of the poem avoids the foolishness of the Stoics in Johnson's *Rambler*, no. 32, or Gulliver in the fourth part of his *Travels*, who strive to suppress, rather than educate, their passions, and therefore deny half their humanity. Johnson's "Goods" (ll. 365–6) to be prayed for – "Love" (l. 361), "Patience" (l. 362), and "Faith" (l. 363) – all "transmute[]" (l. 362) one's perception of, and response to, the world; and therefore, although they do not eradicate life's ills, they make them easier to deal with. Finally, Johnson emphasizes in the closing lines of the poem the importance of cooperation between humanity and divinity. Juvenal declares, "I show you what you can give yourself." By contrast, Johnson stresses that Love, Patience, and Faith are "*for* Man" but "ordain[ed]" *by* "Heav'n" (l. 365). Thus, the human mind, in concert with divinity, avoids the fruitless pursuit of evanescent or changeable objects engaged in by the self-deceived exempla by, instead, "mak[ing] the Happiness [one] does not find" (l. 368).

The Vanity of Human Wishes occupies a distinctive place in literary history as the imitation to end all imitations, because its argument is constructed pointedly to prove the fallaciousness of the argument of the poem it imitates. Indeed, "irreconcilable dissimilitude[s]" between the classical world of ancient Rome and the early modern world of eighteenth-century England pervade both of Johnson's Juvenalian imitations

and helped prompt him, I suspect, after the publication of *The Vanity* in 1749, consciously to abandon further attempts at the genre (Johnson 1905: vol. 3, 247).

As Johnson grew older, he took notice of incongruities that undermine the historical analogies between *London* and Juvenal's Third Satire, such as Charles Hitch's remark, noted earlier, on the Orgilio episode. In addition, *The Vanity of Human Wishes* is premised on a fundamental philosophical difference with Juvenal's Tenth Satire that takes *The Vanity* as far in the direction of originality as the poetic imitation can go. It is well known, on Johnson's own testimony to Boswell, that he had all of Juvenal's satires "in his head," ready to translate, but that he never did so (Boswell 1934: vol. 1, 193). While this failure to write them out may, in part, be chalked up to Johnson's habitual indolence, it tells only a portion of the story. A more satisfying explanation may be found in Johnson's criticism of Pope's *Imitations of Horace* in the "Life of Pope." According to Johnson, imitation became a favorite employment of Pope

> by its facility; the plan was ready to his hand, and nothing was required but to accommodate as he could the sentiments of an old author to recent facts or familiar images; but what is easy is seldom excellent: such imitations cannot give pleasure to common readers. The man of learning may be sometimes surprised and delighted by an unexpected parallel; but the comparison requires knowledge of the original, which will likewise often detect strained applications. Between Roman images and English manners there will be an irreconcilable dissimilitude, and the work will be generally uncouth and party-coloured; neither original nor translated, neither ancient nor modern. (Johnson 1905: vol. 3, 246–7)

The failure to reflect life accurately; the derivative and exclusionary qualities of imitation, accessible only to the classically trained; the ease with which such poems could be cobbled together out of earlier poems – all these reasons help account for Johnson's decision not to write more imitations. In addition, Johnson found himself confronting the same historiographical paradox that humanist scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries constantly faced. They "aimed at resurrecting the ancient world in order to copy and imitate it, but the more thoroughly and accurately the process of resurrection was carried out, the more evident it became that copying and imitation were impossible – or could never be anything more than copying and imitation" (Pocock 1987: 4).

Beyond these intellectual reasons, Johnson seems to have experienced an almost visceral impatience with the imitation, as though his well-known love of argument got the better of him when he sat down to write. Virtually all other successful writers of poetic imitations enjoyed playing by the rules of the genre, especially in pursuing the ingenious historical parallels that lie at the heart of these poems. Dryden delighted in ventriloquizing, interpolation, and glancing allusions in his paraphrastic translations as clever devices for attacking his enemies while professing to be doing nothing of the sort. Pope luxuriated in the artistic process of creating a literary persona and constructing literary artifacts based on extended historical conceits that allowed him to create satiric ironies clothed in words of praise, as in the brilliant "Epistle

to Augustus." Oldham enjoyed extending historical conceits as far as they could go without breaking, as in his translations/imitations of Horace's *Ars Poetica* and Juvenal's Third Satire. But Johnson always seems impatient and somewhat contemptuous of the artistic process. For him, the aesthetic game is much less important than truth. In *London,* Johnson visibly forces his parallels in the service of ideological conviction; in *The Vanity of Human Wishes,* he violently disrupts them in the service of theological truth.

Ultimately, Johnson's dissatisfaction with imitation helped lay the groundwork for the new emphasis on originality that was developing by the mid-eighteenth century. When Johnson learned of Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), with its enthusiastic endorsement of originality, he readily agreed with Young, only adding that he was "surprized to find Young receive as novelties, what [Johnson] thought very common maxims" (Boswell 1964: vol. 5, 269). By 1759, Johnson and the wise Imlac in *Rasselas* both agreed that "no man was ever great by imitation" (Johnson 1990: 41).

See also chs. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party; 4, "Poetry and Religion"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics"; 33, "The Classical Inheritance."

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19
William Collins, "Ode on the Poetical Character"

John Sitter

William Collins's "Ode on the Poetical Character" is arguably the most difficult English lyric poem written before the 1790s and one of the most difficult of any era. Confronting the nature of its difficulty directly may best help one appreciate the 25-year-old poet's high achievement. That difficulty stems in part from Collins's personal vision and in part from historical and generic conventions. Since its revival in the seventeenth century, the ode, descending generally from Pindar and Horace, was associated with loftiness and obscurity [*see* ch. 28, "The Ode"]. These expectations persisted into the early nineteenth century; thus, Wordsworth's ode "Intimations of Immortality" comprises grander diction, statelier syntax, more abrupt transitions, and more speculative philosophy than his lesser lyrics. But Collins seems to have regarded the ode as a medium for psychological exploration to a greater extent than had seventeenth-century predecessors such as Ben Jonson, Abraham Cowley, Andrew Marvell, or John Dryden. Many of the dozen *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects* (dated 1747, actually published December 20, 1746) look inward, forgoing narrative or public events. Instead, they depict the "shad'wy Tribes of *Mind*" alluded to in the "Ode on the Poetical Character" (l. 47): those passions, perceptions, and mental states that seem to have interested Collins precisely because of their elusive force. In "Ode on the Poetical Character" Collins takes on the subject of such demanding modern works as W. B. Yeats's Byzantium poems or many of Wallace Stevens's meditations, namely, the source and power of poetic imagination itself.

Collins approaches the subject obliquely, beginning with an extended simile alluding to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*: just as the belt ("girdle") properly belonging to the chaste Florimel cannot be worn by an unworthy pretender to virtue, so poetic genius is given to only a few. But since most readers new to Collins find his syntax every bit as challenging as his allusions, it will help to work through the poem's three parts, beginning in each case with straightforward, deliberately unimaginative paraphrases.

Strophe: Fancy's Gift and Chosen Poets

The first section (the strophe) and third (the antistrophe) follow identical metrical patterns; they are separated by a middle section (mesode), which in this case consists of thirty-two lines in tetrameter couplets. Here is the strophe:

As once, if not with light Regard,
I read aright that gifted Bard,
(Him whose School above the rest
His loveliest *Elfin* Queen has blest.)
One, only One, unrival'd Fair,
Might hope the magic Girdle wear,
At solemn Turney hung on high,
The Wish of each love-darting Eye;

Lo! to each other Nymph in turn applied,
As if, in Air unseen, some hov'ring Hand,
Some chaste and Angel-Friend to Virgin-Fame,
With whisper'd Spell had burst the starting Band,
It left unblest her loath'd dishonour'd Side;
Happier hopeless Fair, if never
Her baffled Hand with vain Endeavour
Had touch'd that fatal Zone to her denied!
Young *Fancy* thus, to me Divinest Name,
To whom, prepar'd and bath'd in Heav'n,
The Cest of amplest Pow'r is given:
To few the God-like Gift assigns,
To gird their blest prophetic Loins,
And gaze her Visions wild, and feel unmix'd her Flame!

Here is the barest sense of these lines:

Just as only one of Spenser's beautiful women could hope to win the prize sash, so young Fancy (creative Imagination) gives the power of her own heavenly belt only to those few she lets share her visions and passion.

And here is an attempt to render its prose "statement" more completely:

Just as once, if I read Spenser rightly, only one peerless beauty could hope to wear the magic belt displayed at the solemn tournament (coveted by many of the young women, though if any but the deserving one tried to put it on it would fall from her body, so that she would then be more shamed than if she'd never presumed to wear it), so young Fancy, most divine to me and endowed from heaven with her own powerful belt, bestows its power only on the chosen few whom she lets share her visions and feel her passion.

Arriving at either of these paraphrases takes considerable time and energy, and neither will seem fully right to many readers. The immediate sources of difficulty and ambiguity are diction, allusion, and syntax. The first two are related, as Collins not only refers to an incident from *The Faerie Queene* but uses exotic diction to suggest Spenser's language. Several words in the strophe were already archaic or at least uncommon in the 1740s, just as many of Spenser's were in the 1590s. Eighteenth-century writers, for example, did not often use *aright* as an adverb, *girdle*, *cest*, and *zone* for *belt* and *sash*, or *turney* for *tournament*. While many of Collins's contemporaries would readily invert normal word order when composing poetry, thus arriving at a phrase like *the magic Girdle wear* for *wear the magic girdle*, they would not normally omit *to* before an infinitive verb (*hope . . . wear*, instead of *hope to . . . wear*).

When the allusions and obscure words have been sorted out, usually with the help of modern editorial footnotes, the reader still faces an unusually difficult syntactic structure. As the paraphrases indicate, the twenty-two lines of the strophe are a single sentence, despite the printed punctuation. (Eighteenth-century punctuation sometimes indicates pauses rather than grammatical distinctions, and in many cases represents decisions made by the printer rather than the author.) Long sentences are not necessarily difficult; some are really no more than a series of short sentences spliced together. Collins's sentence is highly parenthetical and "periodic": that is, its central idea is not complete until near the end, with the main subject and verb: "*Fancy* . . . assigns" (ll. 17–20). The underlying structure of the strophe is *Just as X, so Y*: just as only one woman could win, so only a few poets are favored. But that structure is nearly swamped by the amount of parenthetical information loaded on immediately. The first marked parenthesis (ll. 3–4), is actually the ode's second, for the poem interrupts itself in the first line with the parenthetical qualification "*if* not with light Regard, / I read aright that gifted Bard." That qualification slows one down even more in uncertainty as to whether to read *read* as the present or past tense of the verb: as referring to the speaker's ongoing interpretation of Spenser or to some earlier encounter with him. And that fleeting indecision has in turn the odd, retroactive effect of rendering the first two words ambiguous: does the phrase "As once" refer to episodes from *The Faerie Queene* (yes, eventually) or to an episodic memory of reading and interpretation?

Once past these parentheses, we get our bearings only briefly before plunging again into qualification and elaboration. The momentary clearing comes at line 6; there, briefly, at least the first half of a comparison can be grasped: just as once upon a time only one fair lady could hope to wear the magic girdle . . . but we have to work through another ten lines before getting, in line 17, to the "thus" (or "so" in modern parlance) that "just as" has led us to expect and which eventually applies the comparison to prophetic poets. In between come three stages of modification. First, the girdle is the one displayed at each tournament and coveted by all (ll. 7–8). Next, it is the belt that would fall off the waist of any but the rightful owner (ll. 9–13). Finally, it is the belt that left unworthy pretenders less happy than if they had not tried to wear it at all (ll. 14–16). Each of these modifications might be regarded as

parenthetical, and the middle one (ll. 9–13) even includes a parenthesis of its own (ll. 10–12): the belt falls off "as if" some invisible hand "burst" it apart. And with each modification the point of view changes. The girdle is first the general focus of attention for all attending the tournament, where it hangs "on high." Then it is seen in a succession of close-ups, falling from the bodies of individual women. The final point of view is that of the humiliated pretenders themselves, "hopeless" as a result of their overreaching.

Our labor so far naturally raises the question of what all this difficulty is *for*. What is the function of syntax so demanding, assertion so qualified, and an extended simile so elusive? Before taking these questions up, let us get the whole poem in mind.

Mesode: Fancy and the Creation

One of Collins's early editors and admirers, the poet Anna Barbauld, called the audacious mesode a "strange and by no means reverential fiction concerning the Divine Being" (Collins 1797: xxiv). It comprises a series of sixteen tetrameter couplets, somewhat breathless and insistent in their rhythms:

The Band, as Fairy Legends say,
Was wove on that creating Day,
When He, who call'd with Thought to Birth
Yon tented Sky, this laughing Earth,
And drest with Springs, and Forests tall,
And pour'd the Main engirting all,
Long by the lov'd *Enthusiast* woo'd,
Himself in some Diviner Mood,
Retiring, sate with her alone,
And plac'd her on his Saphire Throne,
The whiles, the vaulted Shrine around,
Seraphic Wires were heard to sound,
Now sublimest Triumph swelling,
Now on Love and Mercy dwelling;
And she, from out the veiling Cloud,
Breath'd her magic Notes aloud:
And Thou, Thou rich-hair'd Youth of Morn,
And all thy subject Life was born!
The dang'rous Passions kept aloof,
Far from the sainted growing Woof:
But near it sate Ecstatic *Wonder*,
List'ning the deep applauding Thunder:
And *Truth*, in sunny Vest array'd,
By whose the Tarsel's Eyes were made;
All the shad'wy Tribes of *Mind*,
In braided Dance their Murmurs join'd,

And all the bright uncounted *Pow'rs*,
Who feed on Heav'n's ambrosial Flow'rs.
Where is the Bard, whose Soul can now
Its high presuming Hopes avow?
Where He who thinks, with Rapture blind,
This hallow'd Work for Him design'd?

Here is its underlying sense:

Legends say the band was woven when God the Creator, long loved by Fancy, retired with her alone and put her on his throne; then Fancy sang and the youth of morn and his subject life were born. The dangerous passions took no part in weaving the belt, but Wonder, Truth, the shadowy tribes of mind, and the benign powers all did. Where is the poet who can avow his own ambition and imagine this hallowed work meant for him?

An attempt to render Collins more closely might result in the following:

According to fairy legends, the band was woven on the day God, who created the sky, earth, and sea and who had long been loved by Fancy, retired alone with her in an even more divine mood than usual, putting her on his sapphire throne while angelic harps played, sublimely and tenderly, and Fancy sang from within a cloud, and you, the rich-haired youth of morn, and all your subject life were born. The dangerous passions kept away from the holy weaving, but Wonder, Truth, all the shadowy tribes of mind, and all the bright powers who feed on the flowers of heaven joined their murmurs in a braided dance. Where now is the poet whose soul can avow its own ambition and who, in blind rapture, imagines this hallowed work designed for him?

As both paraphrases indicate, the thirty-two lines contain only three sentences. The fuller version better reflects the length and complexity of the first of these (ll. 23–40). In this long sentence, most of what follows the first two lines modifies "that creating Day," specifying increasingly just what made it *that* day and just how profoundly creative it was. (I will explore the ambiguous status of lines 25–8 below.) Once we understand this underlying grammar, the sentence is less difficult than the poem's opening sentence. It contains as many subordinate clauses as the first sentence, but of less complexity (technically, adverbial and adjectival rather than absolute constructions), and it breaks more readily into a series of shorter phrases and clauses linked by *and*. This near run-on quality – common in children's speech – also contributes to the excited breathlessness of the sentence. The section as a whole follows the same contrastive structure as the strophe and antistrophe: a long visionary excursion to Back Then or Up There is followed by a short conclusion returning to Here and Now (ll. 51–4; cf. ll. 17–22 and 72–6).

The mesode's difficulty is less syntactic than thematic. Collins's mixture of "fairy" legend and Genesis leads to a surprising creation story, one that seems to be revealing what happened some time after or during the biblical creation. Interpreters differ over just how heterodox this narrative is, a question considered below. Both paraphrases

avoid "translating" the poem's most contested ambiguity, the "rich-hair'd Youth of Morn" (l. 39). Many critics understand this phrase to refer to the sun; another group, probably smaller but influential, take it to mean the poet. We will be better able to consider this crux and other difficulties in the section in light of the whole poem.

Antistrophe: Milton's Paradise and Collins's Present

Either in response to what seemed the rhetorical questions at the end of the previous section (where now is the chosen poet?) or in an abrupt change of subject, the third section of the ode begins with an imaginative vision of an Eden that seems both Miltonic and actual. It possesses features distinctive of Milton's garden but is also *like* (l. 62) his imagined paradise. Paradoxically, Collins's act of comparing his garden to one existing in another poem (see *Paradise Lost*, iv. 131ff.) implies that his is real, rather than literary, and revealed directly to him – a technique Milton himself had used in comparing his Eden to the paradises of mythology.

> High on some Cliff, to Heav'n up-pil'd,
> Of rude Access, of Prospect wild,
> Where, tangled round the jealous Steep,
> Strange Shades o'erbrow the Valleys deep,
> And holy *Genii* guard the Rock,
> Its Gloomes embrown, its Springs unlock,
> While on its rich ambitious Head,
> An *Eden*, like his own, lies spread.
>
> I view that Oak, the fancied Glades among,
> By which as *Milton* lay, His Ev'ning Ear,
> From many a Cloud that drop'd Ethereal Dew,
> Nigh spher'd in Heav'n its native Strains could hear:
> On which that ancient Trump he reach'd was hung;
> Thither oft his Glory greeting,
> From *Waller*'s Myrtle Shades retreating,
> With many a Vow from Hope's aspiring Tongue,
> My trembling Feet his guiding Steps pursue;
> In vain – Such Bliss to One alone,
> Of all the Sons of Soul was known,
> And Heav'n, and *Fancy*, kindred Pow'rs,
> Have now o'erturn'd th'inspiring Bow'rs,
> Or curtain'd close such Scene from ev'ry future View.

A single paraphrase should suffice for this section:

> *High on a wild cliff, steep, gloomy, guarded by holy genii, lies an Eden like Milton's. I see the oak under which Milton lay in the evenings and received heavenly inspiration and on which his*

trumpet was hung. Often moving toward this Miltonic scene and away from Waller's milder poetry, I vow to follow Milton and do so with trembling feet. But in vain: one mortal alone has known such bliss, and Heaven and Fancy have now overturned the inspiring bowers or hidden them from every future view.

The antistrophe's four sentences (in my construal, periods would replace the semicolon and colon at lines 67 and 71) are from four to eight lines long and generally much simpler structurally than those in earlier sections. The poetic inversions – nouns before adjectives (ll. 56 and 58), a preposition after its object (l. 63), and two direct objects before verbs (ll. 68 and 71) – pose little difficulty, at least for readers who have dipped into Milton. The major interpretative question, to which we will return, is how pessimistic the ending really might be.

Analysis and Synthesis

The ode's basic narrative, then, presents three different scenes and tells something of the speaker's relation to the first and third of them. The first is in the Spenserian world of *The Faerie Queene*; the second in heaven, where God and Fancy collaborate; and the third within sight of Eden. The subjective relation to the first scene depends wholly on metaphorical analogy: Fancy, like the Fairy Queen, rewards the chosen few, and the speaker is a devotee of Fancy ("to me Divinest Name"), presumably hoping to be among the few. The second scene is impersonal in comparison; the speaker claims no unmediated vision of it ("as Fairy Legends say . . .") and yet presents it with the absolute assurance of revelation. The third scene is somewhere between fairyland and heaven, an Eden that seems to be both Milton's subject and the scene of his inspiration. The speaker hoped to enter its "inspiring Bow'rs," but God and Fancy, the "kindred Pow'rs" who perhaps created it, have now hidden it from mortal sight.

While it is important to understand the story of Collins's ode, the harder one looks for narrative or scenic coherence the more obvious complications and gaps become. The elaborate opening simile is not only bookish and far-fetched but incongruous: the belt is to Florimel as Fancy is to chosen poets. Collins compares these prophetic males (by the end of the poem, they are "Sons of Soul") to a woman, and not just to a being who happens to be feminine but one conspicuous for femininity through her beauty and chastity. Because Fancy is also feminine (invariably the case in the period), the analogy is poised to spill over somewhat, implying a further comparison between Fancy and Florimel. And in fact such a connection emerges through the fact that Fancy not only "*assigns*" the belt (as does God ultimately in Spenser) but was herself "*given*" it (as is Florimel). Metaphoric logic carries a step further: if Fancy and the poets are both like Florimel, then the poem seems to half say that gifted poets are not just chosen by Fancy but essentially *are* Fancy.

The strophe ends ambiguously. On the one hand, there is the suggestion that poetic ambition is dangerous and likely to be thwarted: only few succeed and the

unsuccessful may be as "dishonour'd" as the would-be Florimels, ending up more "hopeless" than if they had not aspired to prophetic poetry. On the other hand, the speaker is a votary of Fancy who knows so well what her gift brings – the power to "gaze her Visions wild, and feel unmix'd her Flame!" – that perhaps he has already received it.

Let us now return to the question of the function of the poem's immediate difficulty. One effect is to signal at the outset what sublime odes often signal, the revelation of esoteric truths. Difficulty announces that the poem is embarking on a demanding visionary ascent unsuitable for casual readers. But Collins's parenthetical entanglements have the more specific effect of complicating and almost frustrating the poem's narrative. The once-upon-a-time sequence comes to a virtual standstill almost immediately as the speaker provides more and more detail. The narrative simile begins to seem less important in its own right than as a means of evoking a world of Spenserian romance and allegory through static pictures. Although these three views (ll. 7–8, 9–13, 14–16) necessarily occur in sequence, Collins's heavy use of parenthetical qualification and periodic syntax suggests that everything really happens at the same instant. The tension Collins creates between narrative movement and emblematic close-up captures better in a few lines the deep experience of reading *The Faerie Queene* than do many of the period's outright Spenserian imitations, even those by the best of his "School" (l. 3). [*See* ch. 35, "Recovering the Past: Shakespeare, Spenser, and British Poetic Tradition."] At a level below the strophe's logical argument, then, Collins uses Florimel's belt not merely as material for a bookish conceit but to fuse his idea of the true poetic gift with Spenser. We learn just two things about the speaker personally in the strophe, and they are presumably closely related. The first is that he is an ardent reader of Spenser; the second is that he is a votary of Fancy ("to me Divinest Name," l. 17).

If Spenser marks the beginning of modern English poetry for Collins, Milton may mark its end. But the poem's path to Milton goes by way of heaven, and the "Ecstatic Wonder" (l. 43) of the mesode should be kept vividly in mind by those who would make Collins's poem into a tragic *farewell to*, rather than lyric *ode on*, the poetical character. While there can be no mistaking the joyfulness of the creation scene described in most of the mesode (through line 50), readers have often disagreed over whether its ecstasy accompanies a bold rewriting of the creation or a fundamentally orthodox elaboration. Roger Lonsdale (whose invaluable edition of Collins should be consulted for further details) stresses the orthodoxy of this "frequently misunderstood" section. Acknowledging its difficulty, he notes that the idea "that the poet, however faintly," imitates the "divine power" of the Creator was common from the fifteenth century on. In Lonsdale's view, the passage comes down to the statement that "God created the world (ll. 23–8) by an act of Fancy (ll. 29–40) and in this way the poetic imagination was born (ll. 41–50)" (Lonsdale 1969: 430). But to many this reading seems wishful and overly tame.

Major differences in meaning will flow from a reader's decision about exactly *what* is being created, *who* is creating it, and, to a lesser extent, *when* he or they are doing it. The temporal ambiguity is encountered first, in lines 25–8. Does the specification

of the "creating Day" as one "when He, who call'd with Thought to Birth" the sky, earth, and ocean mean that it is the *same* day (the fourth in Genesis) or merely that it occurs sometime *after* those acts of creation? According to the latter view, line 25 in effect reads, "When He, who *had* called with thought to birth," and points to a later time in which Fancy is part of a special creation. It was a creation God carried out in a "Diviner Mood" – a phrase Anna Barbauld understandably found shocking – than that required for the creation of the physical world. The summary by Lonsdale and the readings of many other critics lean toward the former interpretation: having Fancy present at the creation is Collins's way of saying that God created the world through an act of imaginative thought. However, *Diviner* is unmistakably comparative, suggesting that God's time alone with the "lov'd *Enthusiast*" Fancy was even more creative than the time preceding it. The claim seems a heavenly version of Dryden's urbane speculation at the beginning of *Absalom and Achitophel* that Absalom may be the result of an especially enthusiastic conception, that perhaps, "inspired by some diviner lust, / His father got him with a greater gust" (ll. 19–20). The sexual analogy is apropos because Collins's account of the connection between God and Fancy implies a procreative union. Fancy has long "woo'd" God and has been "lov'd" by her in return. He retires alone with her behind a "veiling Cloud," puts her on his "Saphire Throne" as angelic music is "swelling," and birth follows.

Whether one sees Fancy as a co-creator with God (a "by no means reverential fiction concerning the Divine Being") or as an allegorical representation of one of God's attributes, Collins deepens the Renaissance analogy of divine and poetic creation. In addition to the similarity between God and the poet, Collins ties creation to song. God called other things "to Birth" merely "with Thought" (l. 25), but the poetic "Band," the "Youth of Morn," and his "subject Life" are all born when Fancy "Breath'd her magic Notes aloud" (l. 38). As noted earlier, the identity of the Youth has been much debated. Some critics see him as the poet (for example, Bloom and Frye) or the "Poetical Character" (Kirk), some insist he is the sun (for example, Lonsdale and Woodhouse), and others believe that these readings fuse, given the mythological associations of Apollo with both the sun and poetry (for example, Weiskel and the present author). Some deep connection between the Youth and the poet seems essential because he is created along with the "Band" of imagination (l. 23) and his own "subject Life" (l. 40). While all life might be said to be "subject" to the sun, the phrase is unusual enough, in fact apparently unique, to suggest that this special creation brings into being the subjects of poetry.

What might it mean to create the poetry's "subject Life"? Since the phrase immediately returns the poem to the weaving of the band (ll. 41–50), it becomes necessary to reconsider the belt's function. Thomas Weiskel shrewdly observes that its Spenserian original, Florimel's girdle, serving as both the sign and the protector of chastity, "has the talismanic ambiguity common in allegorical imagery; it is at once emblem and cause" (Bloom 1971: 138). In other words, the belt both rewards or signals true poetic imagination and produces it. Applying a similar suspension of the normal laws of cause and effect to Collins's description of the belt's original weaving, we might

regard those things he associates with its creation – "*Wonder*," "*Truth*," the "shad'wy Tribes of *Mind*," and the angelic "*Pow'rs*" – as also being its original creations. These things are both attendant at the birth of the poetic imagination and brought into view by it. The poetry of heaven envisions the invisible.

The next lines are sometimes taken to suggest a tragic fall into a constricted present: "Where is the Bard, whose Soul can now / Its high presuming Hopes avow?" (ll. 51–2). But that may be to misread *now* as referring to the moment of the ode's composition rather than to a more general modernity, a poetic era long after the Creation and some time after the age of Spenser. The second question – "Where He who thinks, with Rapture blind, / This hallowed Work for Him design'd? (ll. 53–4) – indicates that neither question is rhetorical, and that the answer to both is Milton, to whom the antistrophe turns. This section opens by echoing the word *high*, now transferred from "high presuming Hopes" to the reality of poetic achievement, an Eden created "High on some Cliff." (The close repetition may remind the reader that the girdle originally "hung on high" at the start of the poem.) In yet another conflation of cause and effect, high Eden is both cause and result of Milton's high inspiration (ll. 55–67).

The final turn of the antistrophe toward the immediate present (ll. 68–76) begins with a personal recognition of Milton's greatness that many interpreters regard also as a confession of inadequacy. But the opening note – "Thither oft his Glory greeting, / From *Waller*'s Myrtle Shades retreating" – is far from gloomy; the brisk trochaic meter of the first line sounds closer to Milton's playful pledge of allegiance in "L'Allegro" (written when he too was in his twenties) than to the tragic notes of *Paradise Lost*. To move away from the influence of Edmund Waller is, for Collins, to turn from the polished "easiness" of Cavalier and Restoration verse (Maynard Mack has called Waller "the crooner of the couplet") to a more "aspiring Tongue" (l. 70). The effect of that aspiration does not disappear with the recognition that the speaker cannot follow Milton's steps all the way back to Eden, despite the readiness of many critics (usually alluding to Collins's later mental collapse) to read the ending as despairing. But if a reader has one eye on the biography it may be difficult to keep the poem in perspective. The final lines – asserting that Milton's achievement was unique and that Heaven and Fancy "Have now o'erturn'd th'inspiring Bow'rs, / Or curtain'd close such Scene from ev'ry future View" – do not declare the death of all varieties of inspiration. As Patricia Spacks concludes, the "poem actually says, not that Heaven and Fancy have abandoned the poet, but that they have destroyed or concealed one particular 'scene' exemplified by Eden" (Spacks 1983: 15–16).

We might go still further toward an optimistic reading of the ode by underscoring the concluding lines' *now* and *future*. The poem's seeming diffidence ("My trembling Feet . . .") is belied by its achievement. Perhaps the inspiring bowers have *now* – just now – been destroyed, but not before they inspired the poem in hand. Perhaps the Edenic "Scene" is closed to any *future* view, but Collins and his readers have just had a good look. Had Collins's health been stronger and his brilliant debut been followed by a body of great poetry, the "Ode on the Poetical Character" might well be read not

as a symptom of crippling "anxiety of influence" or the poet's "burden of the past" but as a heady declaration of independence. Altogether ignoring Alexander Pope, the poet whose influence most of his generation found inescapably burdensome, Collins suggests that the modern poet who would follow Milton cannot realize his "poetical character" by returning to Milton's world any more than Milton could simply revert to Spenser's.

See also chs. 28, "The Ode"; 34, "Augustanism and Pre-Romanticism"; 35, "Recovering the Past: Shakespeare, Spenser, and British Poetic Tradition."

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20
Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*

Suvir Kaul

At the very end of his life of Thomas Gray, Samuel Johnson writes:

> In the character of his Elegy I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours. The *Churchyard* abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. . . . Had Gray written often thus, it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise him. (Johnson 1975: 470)

Since its publication in 1751, Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard* has gone on to worldwide fame, including in translation. It is certainly one of the most anthologized poems in the English language, and has long been prescribed in both school and university syllabi. Literary historians who trace the shift in the eighteenth century from the resolutely classical conception of polite poetry to a more vernacular idiom have emphasized the importance of this poem; indeed, several phrases from it have become commonplaces of the language itself, and lexicographers routinely turn to its lines for examples of usage. Even those critics who dislike parts or all of the poem do not dispute its historical centrality to the canon of English poetry, confirmed both in informal readings and in formal study.

Given all this, Johnson's comments seem both correct and prescient. However, it is hard to think of "the common sense of readers" being the same and unchanging across two centuries and more of the *Elegy*'s popularity, and thus the foundation of the poem's success. In contrast, this essay will argue that if the *Elegy* has the power to move readers separated in time and place, and differentiated by levels of education and class, it is because the knotty, internally riven, shifting concerns of the poem enact the difficulty of achieving poetic, cultural, and social consensus, even as the poem finds, in the iconography and vocabulary of death, loss, and mourning, an affective or emotional substitute for such lack of consensus. Precisely because the poem is uncertain

about the attributes of the "common reader," as also about the proper role of poetry and of the poet in eighteenth-century English culture and society, its explorations of such ideas become more open-ended and inclusive than the more culturally assured and polished forms of neoclassical poetics. We can thus read, embodied in the idiom and formal elements of the *Elegy*, a poetics appropriate to an English readership that crosses social classes and locations; in fact, the poem even features various figures of the unlettered, so much so that it seems to address those who cannot read as much as those who can. Further, the *Elegy* struggles to imagine a contemporary world in which it might successfully communicate existential or ethical or political lessons, and in doing so explores both the possibilities and the limits of the practice of poetry *per se*.

Modern editors of the *Elegy* are divided over the exact period of its composition: some evidence suggests that a section of it was written in 1742, one version is likely to have been written in 1745–6, and a different version, the one published and commonly reprinted since, was completed in 1750 (Lonsdale 1969: 103–10). Gray was dilatory in all his intellectual projects, but this convoluted process of composition might also be understood with reference to the complex and even contradictory themes and concerns he explores. Of particular interest to us is the fact that the second version is arguably a finished poem, but in the final version Gray chose to discard its last four stanzas in favor of a longer meditation upon the power of poetry to preserve into cultural memory people and events. (The discarded stanzas do recognize that the poem, which is "mindful of the unhonour'd Dead" whose "artless Tale" it relates, also functions as a memorial, but their primary concern is to suggest an existential and a Christian conclusion: all must pass through the "cool sequester'd Vale of Life" to their "Doom," but a sensitive poet can find consolation in that he might hear, in the "sacred Calm" of the church graveyard, "In still small Accents, whisp'ring from the Ground / A grateful Earnest of eternal Peace.") In the final version, this meditation is rendered personal and poignant as it develops alongside a vignette of an isolated poet who is not one of the village community, but is often seen by them wandering listlessly ("Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn," l. 107), and who dwindles to an untimely death. The *Elegy* closes with his epitaph, which we learn is engraved upon his gravestone.

That, in sum, is the poem; but compressed into its quatrains is an extraordinary density of intertextual reference, allusions to epochal historical events and persons of national significance, as well as invocations of lives lived within village communities, lives that never come to more public attention. Further, the poem works its way through several poetic conventions developed by poets who linked public and private themes, almost as if to test the staying power of such conventions in historical conditions different from those in which they originated or those in which they became recognizable staples of poetic practice. For instance, the opening vignette of the poem is largely familiar – the poet at rest in a bucolic landscape, composing his poem while he looks on a scene of easy agricultural labor and peaceful cattle or sheep grazing, with the sun on high – but with a crucial difference. The *Elegy* opens in a twilight landscape which contains, for a brief moment, both the ploughman on his "weary way"

home (l. 3) as well as the poet; but this does not so much allow a moment of identity between these two figures as confirm their vocational difference. The ploughman's work is done, the poet's now begins, and his is the work of articulating a poetic form, and an idiom, supple enough to engage both the world of labor and the realm of letters. Indeed, the poet's *work* is the finished form of the poem, and seductive as it might be to imagine an affinity of labor with the ploughman and others like him who are the subjects of the opening section of the *Elegy*, the poet recognizes that his labor is different from theirs. Further, some crucial – and alienating – forms of this difference surface in the halting movement of the poem toward its funereal conclusion. In this way, the *Elegy* enacts its variation on both pastoral and topographical verse, variations that seem motivated, in large part, by a pronounced sense of poetic isolation and vocational difference from the "proper" subjects of such poetry. (This is an idea that we will see developed through the poem, and in this argument.)

But it is not only formal conventions that are explored or modified in the *Elegy*: shortly after it was published, contemporaries of Gray began to comment on what they understood to be the moments of "imitation" in the poem – phrases, images, even lines that echoed the work of earlier poets. Roger Lonsdale's remarkable editorial efforts have made available much of this commentary, and he has added to this considerable list himself. For instance, the opening line, "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day," condenses lines in Dante's *Purgatorio* (viii. 5–6) in which chimes "seem to mourn for the dying day," with the Anglo-Norman specificity of the curfew, which, ever since William the Conqueror had dictated that bells should mark the end of the day, had become synonymous with the fading of the evening and the coming of darkness. Lonsdale also points out that the link between the tolling of bells, the loss of light, the emptying of a populated landscape leaving only the poet, and the death of loved ones signified by "knell," or some combination of these elements, is to be found in Dante's *Inferno*, Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, Milton's "Il Penseroso," Dryden's "Prologue" to *Troilus and Cressida*, James Thomson's *Liberty*, Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, and William Collins's "Ode to Evening" (Lonsdale 1969: 117). This list can be added to; suffice to note that Gray's vocabulary and method in this poem (and indeed in all his poetry) reflect his extensive reading and scholarly immersion in the history of poetry. What results is an echo-chamber of a poem, a poem so dense with, and overdetermined by, poetic memory that its every moment might be understood as an informed meditation on the way the idiom of poetry has been crafted from, and has in return enriched, the common language.

It is possible to argue that this is one reason why the *Elegy* achieved the popularity it did – for to read it is to be provided with a lesson in several of the crucial linguistic and formal features that have, with repetition and time, come to constitute the difference between poetic and common, that is, prosaic usage. (I should make clear that I am not claiming a single consensual standard of common non-poetic usage, but am contrasting the schooled forms of prose with the equally schooled forms of poetry.) In this argument, Gray's poem is the sieve that sifts the nuggets of English (and, to a lesser extent, European) poetry and, in an act of poetic virtuosity, preserves them

even as it transmutes them into the unique filigree that is the *Elegy*. The proper location of the *Elegy*, then, is not so much within topography – a country churchyard – as within poetics; it is composed within the landscapes and locations poetic practices have rendered both vital and conventional. I will not here enlarge on the compendium of allusions and echoes that enliven the first four lines of the poem (Lonsdale's scholarship is a full guide to such details), but quote them here, to be read in the light of the discussion above:

> The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
> The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
> The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
> And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

The sense of loss and isolation produced by the first quatrain can thus be understood not only as the effect of day turning into night, and of the poet left on his own once ploughmen and even herds of cattle have returned home, but also as a product of a heightened consciousness that seems to know that the very language of bells, twilight, lowing herds, and an empty landscape is at once the stuff of poetry as well as symptomatic of the larger isolations of poetic practice. Poetic conventions and the ways of seeing they encourage or impose are both enabling and stultifying: the intensity of feeling here thus derives from the accumulations of an interwoven history of similar poetic practices as much as it does from any experiences or feelings that the *Elegy* seeks to individuate.

There is another important way in which we might contextualize the sense of loss with which the poem opens. We have so far described this sense as the experience of a poet so steeped in the conventional languages of poetry that he works with an enervated appreciation of their contemporary or local possibilities. There is also of course the more literal interpretation, which is that these are the maudlin thoughts of a poet confronted with the markers of death that are gravestones in a country churchyard. However, we need also to remember that Gray is here also exploiting the prospect poem, so much in vogue in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English poetry, in which the poet looks down from a height and celebrates a seamlessly hierarchical society, one in which nature, like the peasantry that works it, and the masters who own it, are arranged in harmonious order. Further, the prospect poem allowed poets to look beyond the horizon, as it were, and see across the borders of the island-state into a world that they were happy to represent in similar terms, as obeying the dictates of an increasingly powerful mercantilist and colonial Britain. Gray's lines refuse all such vision, and thus also any comfortable vocational understanding of the poet as celebrant of elite social or nationalist values; indeed, as the "glimmering landscape" turns dark, vision is no longer the poet's primary faculty of perception, and his sense of his surroundings is sharpened by the *sounds* of a rural evening – droning beetles, the "drowsy tinklings" of distant cattle-bells, and a lone "moping owl" (ll. 5–12).

This shift from the visual to the aural sense suggests a deprivation as well as a new sensitivity, and the failing light prepares us for the inwardness, the moments of contemplative insight, that follow, in which the poet begins to develop the central ethical contrasts that structure the next section of the *Elegy*. The poet can no longer see clearly, but knows of – and feels as a palpable presence – the village graveyard. In this quatrain, the iconography made familiar in graveyard and elegiac poems, several of which were published to considerable public notice in the first half of the 1740s (two examples are Robert Blair's *The Grave* [1743] and Edward Young's *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* [1742–5]) frames the scene: "rugged elms," the shade of a "yew-tree," the "many a mouldering heap" that are the old graves (ll. 13–14). Here, "Each in his narrow cell for ever laid, / The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep" (ll. 15–16). Oddly, this account of the death of villagers is a prelude to the evocation of the *life* of the village (even though this vitality is realized precisely while noting its passing, as signaled in the repeated "No more"):

> The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
> The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
> The cock's shrill clarion or the echoing horn,
> No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.
>
> For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
> Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
> No children run to lisp their sire's return,
> Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.
>
> Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
> Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
> How jocund did they drive their team afield!
> How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!
> (ll. 17–28)

What are we to make of Gray's attempt to portray country life in these idealized communal and organic terms, all the while mourning its passing? Are we to read this passage as an existential meditation on life and death, here incidentally located in the countryside, or is there in fact a historical lesson about transitions in rural English society encoded in these lines? Historians have catalogued important shifts in patterns of rural farming and social organization in eighteenth-century England (many of which followed upon enclosure and the capitalization of agriculture) whose most visible manifestations were the dispossession and decay of small, already impoverished, village communities. While social historians have not turned to Gray's poetry for evidence of such transitions (whose *locus classicus* is Oliver Goldsmith's later poem *The Deserted Village*), it is unlikely that the tone of melancholy that pervades the *Elegy* is entirely insulated from these historical events. Ironically, one way to think about the connections between the poet and the rural community whose passing he

mourns might be to reflect not so much upon his advocacy of its virtues as upon his isolation from it; as John Barrell has written, the easy contrast between the "singular, plodding, and weary" ploughman of the opening stanza and the "jocund" dead ploughmen of line 27 emphasizes the poet's lack of knowledge of any contemporary peasant community. Further, if the poet suggests in this passage any connection with this community in the past, it is only "because he is at liberty to recreate that community on his own terms, just as he wants it to be" (Barrell 1980: 158). Most poets who wrote on rural affairs forged such nostalgic imagined communities – past and present – in their poems; the consequential question here is: What purpose is served in the *Elegy* by this depiction of the diurnal rhythms and daily rituals of village life as a lost world, alive only in the poet's re-creation?

Two adjectival phrases in these lines point us toward the contrasts to come: the "rude Forefathers" of line 16 and the "lowly bed" of line 20 specify that the vitality of these lives is meant to be a direct function of their uncultured simplicity and their social class. Their sturdy happiness, described here in a catalog of village smells and sounds, family activities, and cheerful agricultural labor, is then set against a series of personified abstractions:

> Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
> Their homely joys and destiny obscure;
> Nor Grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,
> The short and simple annals of the poor.
> (ll. 29–32)

Both "Ambition" and "Grandeur" are imagined as potentially contemptuous of the lives of these villagers; or, more precisely, they are imagined to be disdainful of the "annals of the poor," which we might presume are largely non-existent – except in the brief details of this poem, of course, which makes the poet of the *Elegy* the annalist of the otherwise unsung lives of the rural poor. His stanzas so far have in fact registered "their useful toil, / Their homely joys and destiny obscure," and thus are themselves the "short and simple annals" offered in tribute to such lives.

The poet as annalist, as memorialist of unheralded lives – this is a vocational definition, however indirectly arrived at. This figuration of poetic practice seeks to locate the poet within the simple village society that he describes, but from which he is – crucially – set apart. The poet who writes of this community, and who would speak for it, is separated from its members by his status as an outsider (a visitor from the city, perhaps) who belongs to a different class, and who is lettered where the villagers are illiterate. These distinctions remain, no matter that the poet, in speaking on behalf of village lives, offers his moral critique of ambition and vainglory – the ways of the rich and famous – by pointing out that all paths lead alike to the grave. Again, the stanzas that follow focus not so much on the fact that death is the great equalizer, but on the fact that the monuments to ambition and power erected by the "Proud" are no protection against "the inevitable hour":

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault,
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?
(ll. 33–44)

Nothing preserves against death, these lines argue; does this not mean that all memorials – cathedral services, elaborate tombs and gravestones, statuary, panegyric – are equally pointless? No "trophies" are raised over the graves of the rural poor, but there is nothing to be gained from the elaborate memorials of the rich and powerful: the manifest irony of an "animated" memorial bust, while the original molders as "silent dust," offers pointed and emphatic testimonial to the poet's observations.

Where does this leave the poet, annalist of the rural poor, of whom he is not a part; critic of the memorial practices of the rich and important, from whom he is distanced by the force of his critique? Uncertain of his role and function, perhaps, or, more accurately, searching for a rhetorical position from which both the memorial and the critical functions of poetry can be credibly exercised. In a poet as schooled in the conventions of poetry as Gray this self-consciousness is not surprising; but it might also be thought of as generic. As Thomas Edwards suggests, "An elegy is of course a poem about death itself, but it is also a demonstration of how death is best observed and commemorated – no literary elegy is ever without a certain reflexive consciousness of its own status as memorial object" (Edwards 1971: 126–7). The social dimension of such generic consciousness – at least along one axis – becomes clear if we keep in mind Joshua Scodel's observations on eighteenth-century "paternalistic epitaphs" that commemorate the "simple, generic virtues of such lowly creatures as contented laborers and devoted servants":

> Though they celebrate a realm of supposedly uncontested social values, such epitaphs are in fact nostalgic responses to, and participants in, vast and unsettling social change. In the face of the mounting tension between classes that accompanied the onset of capitalist relations, epitaphs upon exemplary members of the lower orders, or upon animals such as faithful dogs that could represent the lower orders, attempt to demonstrate in a radically new way the enduring mutual affection of high and low.

At stake, as Scodel puts it, is the "social role of the dead" (Scodel 1991: 10).

If this is in part the ideological function of the *Elegy*'s lines on the lives and deaths of villagers – the positing of a world of "supposedly uncontested social relations," one conceived in a nostalgia that stems from an awareness of "unsettling social change" – then what is to be made of the poem's critique of (presumably urban and) upper-class hubris? Before we answer that question, it is important to linger on those lines in the poem, particularly the last quatrain of those quoted below, which have lingered most forcefully in public memory, and indeed have taken on a life of their own:

> Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
> Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
> Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
> Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.
>
> But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
> Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
> Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,
> And froze the genial current of the soul.
>
> Full many a gem of purest ray serene
> The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:
> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air.
>
> (ll. 45–56)

William Empson's comments on the last stanza trenchantly articulate his more general irritation at "the complacence in the massive calm of the poem"; he argues that these lines, "as the context makes clear," are a complaint

> that eighteenth-century England had no scholarship system. . . . This is stated as pathetic, but the reader is put into a mood in which one would not try to alter it. . . . By comparing the social arrangement to Nature [Gray] makes it seem inevitable, which it was not, and gives it a dignity which was undeserved. (Empson 1979: 4)

These stanzas seem to bemoan the lack of a mechanism of social mobility that might allow rural talent to achieve public success, and thus allow villagers to turn into great imperialists or composers or poets. And yet "Knowledge," presumably indispensable in the training of rulers or artists, is here figured as a species of plunderer, "Rich with the spoils of time." Lonsdale compares this line to both Browne ("Rich with the spoils of nature," *Religio Medici*, i. xiii) and Dryden ("For, rich with Spoils of many a conquer'd Land," "Palamon and Arcite," ii. 452), and this configuration of images allows us to chart the peculiar ambivalence of Gray's usage: on the one hand a lack of knowledge prevents the country poor from becoming the great; on the other, Knowledge is figured in the precise terms that make the great ethically and socially suspect. Knowledge is here one in the series of overbearing abstractions – Ambition,

Grandeur, ye Proud, Honour, Flattery – that are presented as the moral antitheses of the simple lives of the villagers.

And then there is the gem "of purest ray serene" that is presumed to lie unseen in the "dark unfathomed caves of ocean," and the flowers that are "born to blush unseen, / And waste {their} sweetness on the desert air." (We might note the interesting catachrestic play in these lines, where organic nature and commodity are rendered interchangeable: the flower is seen to "waste" its sweetness if it blooms without admirers – as opposed to growing and decaying as part of an organic cycle – and the gem is seen to possess immanent value without being a commodity, that is, without circulating within the market processes that in fact endow gems with their value.) Empson is unsparing in his reading of the effect of comparing these "natural treasures" to the lives of the rural poor:

> a gem does not mind being in a cave and a flower prefers not to be picked; we feel like the man is like the flower, as short-lived, natural, and valuable, and this tricks us into feeling that he is better off without opportunities. The sexual suggestion of *blush* brings in the Christian idea that virginity is good in itself, and so that any renunciation is good; this may trick us into feeling that it is lucky for the poor man that society keeps him unspotted from the World. The tone of melancholy claims that the poet understands the considerations opposed to aristocracy, though he judges against them; the truism of the reflections in the churchyard, the universality and impersonality this gives to the style, claim as if by comparison that we ought to accept the injustice of society as we do the inevitability of death. (Empson 1979: 5)

We can now add Empson's reading to our understanding of the melancholy affect of the *Elegy*: the poem's tone is both defense against, and moral commentary on, the aggressive, self-aggrandizing personifications of aristocratic pretension. Similarly, the truisms and universalisms the poem features are not simply rhetorical forms that enact poetic calm in the face of death, but are in fact necessary to disavow its recognition of social and economic differences. Another way to state this is to say that the *Elegy* fuses, simply and memorably, existential resignation and social passivity, and does so precisely by developing a sustained critique not so much of upper-class wealth as of the vainglory enabled by that wealth. This combination of social acquiescence and moral critique generates the poem's incorporative ideological power: lost village communities are mourned, their idealized simplicity and vitality set against the immoral and boastful corruptions of the "Proud," and the rhetorical power with which this ethical opposition is developed forecloses the need to consider other ways in which the socio-cultural elevation of the rich might be connected to the material and cultural dispossession of the rural poor.

While the dominant tone of the *Elegy* is set by its meditations upon human transience and the small compensations of fortitude, it is not empty of more direct historical and socio-political reference. Lines 57–60 invoke three figures whose lives and careers were linked during the tumultuous Civil War period in English history:

Hampden, Milton, and Cromwell. Each of these figures is seen as representative of the public profile that follows from participation in – and leadership of – affairs of national consequence; but here they are invoked to emphasize, via negation, the socially destructive acts that the rural poor are saved from performing. Their "lot" denies these villagers opportunities and circumscribes their "growing virtues," but also confines their "crimes" by forbidding them "to wade through slaughter to a throne, / And shut the gates of mercy on mankind" (ll. 65–8). Presumably, Cromwell (rather than the fairly innocuous parliamentarian Hampden) is an appropriate subject for such condemnation, and perhaps the invocation of Milton – the odd man out here – is justified by the following reference to poets who "heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride / With incense kindled at the Muse's flame" (ll. 71–2). However, the general and even vague terms – in keeping with the method of the poem – in which Hampden, Milton, and Cromwell are described as being exemplary of those whose lives deny "conscious truth" and repress "ingenuous shame" (ll. 69–70) do not so much allow the *Elegy* historical purchase and specificity as much as dissolve particular reference into the abstraction of moral universalisms. Thus, the stanza that follows returns to a familiar opposition: not one that develops the contrast between personalities prominent during the Civil War and the common people then, but the oft-repeated, indeed formulaic, contrast between city and country ways, between the "ignoble strife" of "the madding crowd" and the "noiseless tenor" of the lives of the villagers (ll. 73–6).

This return to the "cool sequestered vale of life" (l. 75) is also a return to the country churchyard, with its gravestones, each a rudimentary memorial, "With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked," that "Implores the passing tribute of a sigh" (ll. 77–80). (In line 75, the word "sequestered," which describes the "vale of life" within which the villagers live, suggests not only seclusion but also forcible dispossession. Parliamentary, judicial, and clerical records offer many instances of people dispossessed from their livings, but this is not a suggestion developed by the poem.) In these lines, the poem also reprises two of its central themes, those of commemoration and of literacy. The "uncouth rhymes" are carved by an "unlettered muse" in "place of fame and elegy," but their moral purpose, if not their polish, is unexceptionable: unlike the memorial monuments of the rich, these function properly as the "holy text" that teaches "the rustic moralist to die" (ll. 81–4). This is, of course, a somewhat fraught claim to make in an elegy, for it disavows the form even as it performs it, and the complexity – the contradiction – of the poet's thought is intensified by the lines that follow. The contrast is now between literate and illiterate, "cultured" and "uncultured," artificial and "artless" modes of remembrance (l. 94) – or, more to the point, between poetic and communal forms, understood as mutually incompatible. The way to survive "dumb Forgetfulness" is for the dying to live on in "some fond breast," or in the tears, the "pious drops," that sorrowfully mark a passing. To die within a community that mourns and remembers is to let "the voice of nature" speak even "from the tomb"; it is the way to preserve, phoenix-like, the "wonted fires" of life even in "our ashes" (ll. 89–92). Formal elegies that are *read* are of no memorial

or moral use here; the shared sorrows and memories of the community preserve and authenticate lives in ways prior to, and better than, the celebrated forms of public fame and elegiac practice.

Having arrived at this crux, the poem turns self-reflexive, making the poet its subject. He now thinks of his own death – and of his epitaph – but his sense of poetic self is derived from his practices in this poem, where he, "mindful of the unhonoured dead" (those interred in the country churchyard), has "in these lines" related "their artless tale" (ll. 93–4). The village tale he has told might be "artless" (the word itself perhaps a curious and sad attempt to mediate between the "uncouth rhymes" of the "rustic moralist" and the hyper-literate practices of elegy), but his artifice, his *poetry*, is precisely a confirmation of his isolation from this rural community. And this is in fact the final image of himself that he offers, as he imagines a "kindred spirit" (another city visitor, perhaps) coming to the village to enquire after him, and learning, from "some hoary-headed swain," of the way he lived and died, in the village but never quite of it:

> "There at the foot of yonder nodding beech
> "That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
> "His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
> "And pore upon the brook that babbles by.
>
> "Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
> "Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,
> "Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,
> "Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.
>
> "One morn I missed him on the customed hill,
> "Along the heath and near his favourite tree;
> "Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
> "Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;
>
> "The next with dirges due in sad array
> "Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne."
> (ll. 101–14)

This, then, is the poet, alienated and neurasthenic, isolated from the villagers whose "short and simple annals" and "artless tale" he writes in his poem. He lives, though he does not work, within its diurnal rhythms, and dwindles to a lonely death. (We might add that the poet is as little at home, as it were, in the idiom and iconography of pastoral as he is in the village community: the nodding beech that conventionally provides comforting shade from the noontime sun to the youthful and vigorous pastoral poet piping on his flute here takes on a form as convoluted as his distress, its drooping leaves and "fantastic roots" echoing his melancholia and his forlorn, crazed woe.)

What remains, and concludes the *Elegy*, is not so much the memory of the poet among the villagers who saw him at a distance every day, but an epitaph, one whose

elaborate composition marks him out, in death as in life, from the villagers. This separation – the divide of literacy – is emphasized by the villager who leads the enquiring "kindred spirit" to the grave of the poet. "Approach and read," he says to the visitor, "for thou cans't read" (l. 115), and he points to the epitaph engraved on the gravestone. These three epitaphic stanzas, written in the same quatrains as the rest of the poem, mourn "*A Youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.*" To that extent, he is much like the rural folk he wrote about. However, in contrast to their experience,

> *Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,*
> *And Melancholy marked him for her own.*
>
> *Large was his bounty and his soul sincere,*
> *Heav'n did a recompence as largely send:*
> *He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,*
> *He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wished) a friend.*
>
> *No farther seek his merits to disclose,*
> *Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,*
> *(There they alike in trembling hope repose)*
> *The bosom of his Father and his God.*
>
> (ll. 119–28)

"Fair Science" – education and knowledge – raises him above his "humble birth," and he is claimed by Melancholy as her own. Lonsdale remarks that "Melancholy" should be understood here as the form of sensibility that both results in the poet's isolation and enables him to experience unusual social sympathies, and thus as a trait that works in tandem, rather than at odds, with "Science" to encourage his "bounty," sincerity, and empathy for those who are miserable (Lonsdale 1969: 139). This is an important suggestion, one that preserves the productive tensions connecting the poet's feeling for the lost community of the village, his passive resignation in the face of social disparities that he registers (if only obliquely), and his more pointed complaints about extravagant and socially aggressive displays of wealth, in life and in death. And it also reminds us that the *Elegy* escapes the cloying forms of overwrought and self-indulgent poetic sensibility – pity without purpose – only because it traces in the country landscape the rural drama of poverty, work, community, and loss.

The epitaph closes with an injunction to silence, and with the "trembling hope" offered by the consolations of Christian faith, here figured in the bosom of God the Father. We might remember that this moment has been prepared for – and humanized – earlier, in the "fond breast" of communal mourning and remembrance on which the "parting soul relies" (l. 89) in order to live, if only for a bit, beyond death. Once again, Gray's *Elegy* juxtaposes the conventional forms of mourning – here the *consolatio* motifs offered by religion – with the alternative forms of community remembrance the poet intuited and described in his account of village lives and deaths. The Epitaph comes to a trembling close in the former idiom, in its hope of an other-worldly redemption, but the *Elegy* in its entirety reminds us that this final note is less an authoritative

conclusion than it is one more turn in a convoluted, and melancholy, search for a poetic home in this world.

See also chs. 4, "Poetry and Religion"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 22, "Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*, and George Crabbe, *The Village*"; 40, "Rural Poetry and the Self-Taught Tradition."

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21
Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno*

Chris Mounsey

At first sight, Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno* is a strange-looking poem for the eighteenth century. Written with apparently no regard for the rhyme or rhythm by which we usually characterize poetry of the period, the *Jubilate Agno* looks like a collection of random sentences whose only claim to be called a poem may be that each line begins with the word "Let" or "For." Such compulsive repetition could be used to lend support to the rumor that Christopher Smart was mad when he wrote it. There is even a fantastic story that he wrote the poem by scratching it with a key upon the wainscoting (the wooden paneling) of his isolation cell in a lunatic asylum after he was deprived of pen and paper. But this tale is without foundation. The autograph manuscript of the poem, written in pen and on paper, is kept in the Houghton Library of Harvard University.

Though it is true that Smart was incarcerated in a charity madhouse from 1757 to 1758, and then in a private asylum from 1759 to 1763, the period in which he wrote the *Jubilate Agno*, there is no other evidence to corroborate a diagnosis of insanity. On the other hand, there is much to suggest that Smart was simply one of many victims of the madhouse system, where abuses were rife, and through which unwanted or annoying relatives and business associates could be disposed of for a price, with no questions asked. Furthermore, the view that the *Jubilate Agno* is the work of a madman is hard to sustain when it is read alongside his other works from the madhouse years: *A Song to David*, a poem on a similar theme written in an exact rhythm and rhyme scheme; and a metrical translation of all 150 Psalms. It has been argued (Feder 1980) that the *Jubilate Agno* might represent the disordered dimension of a schizoid personality, while the *Song* and Psalms represent the orderly. But such a description falters when we discover on closer scrutiny that the *Jubilate Agno* is marked by as careful an internal and external coherence as are the other works. But, unlike the conventionally metrical poems, the *Jubilate Agno* does not give up its secrets easily.

The *Jubilate Agno* testifies to its authorship by a Cambridge academic with an extraordinary facility in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, science, religion, and philosophy.

Furthermore, Smart had a penchant for associative wordplay within and between the languages and terminologies he knew. He was also a sought-after lyricist of popular songs, and a well-known beer drinker. Locked away for seven years, for the last four of which his reading matter was restricted to the Bible, five reference books – Ainsworth's *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae Compendiarius* (1736), William Salmon's *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* (1707), John Hill's *Useful Family Herbal* (1754), Phillip Miller's *Gardener's Dictionary* (1731), and John Hill's *History of Plants* (1748–52) – and an uncertain supply of newspapers, Christopher Smart wrote his *Jubilate Agno* in a regular, if unusual form: a poem that is a cryptic crossword puzzle with the world outside as its grid.

In its scope the poem reflects the many sides of Smart's personality. It is highly personal and profane in its attacks upon the people Smart did not like. In this it stands shoulder to shoulder with Pope's *Dunciad*. But at the same time it is a theological handbook concerning deeply held Anglican beliefs. In its religiosity, the *Jubilate Agno* could be compared with Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (first published in 1742). Smart's poem is also, literally, an encyclopedia of the natural history of plants, animals, and minerals. This aspect of the *Jubilate Agno* reflects the encyclopedic tendency of the eighteenth century during which, following the work of Linnaeus, many thousands of taxonomies were produced. Unsurprisingly, such a plethora of taxonomic studies were all hopelessly at odds with one another. After his years in Cambridge University, Smart was very familiar with the struggles between scientists, and his *Jubilate Agno* is also a satire on intellectual vanity, in particular the belief that it was possible to give a name to everything in the world. Exemplary in each of these four genres – personal invective, religious poetry, popular science, and moral satire – the *Jubilate Agno* is a poem of its age.

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The title, *Jubilate Agno* ("Rejoice in the Lamb"), reflects the title of the hundredth psalm, *Jubilate Deo* ("Rejoice in God"). To introduce his poem with the word *Jubilate* suggests Smart held an Anglican belief in the uniformity of worship. The hundredth psalm, often known simply as "The *Jubilate*," was then, and is now, in daily use in Anglican morning service. With other, frequently used psalms and Hebrew poems, it is known as a "canticle." However, Smart's modification of *deo* to *agno* evokes a shift in emphasis from God to Jesus, the Son of God, who is known as the "Lamb of God" in the Gospel of St. John. Smart's title, therefore, seems to suggest both conformity in worship and some modification of the regular forms.

The poem itself was written on very large (double folio size) sheets of paper. It was originally composed at a varying rate of one, two, or three pairs of lines a day (where a pair of lines is one line beginning with "Let" and another beginning with "For"). The "Let" lines were grouped on one page, and the corresponding "For" lines on another. W. H. Bond, in his edition of *Jubilate Agno* (1954), worked out the "double" structure of the poem by matching contemporary dates which occasionally occur in both

a “Let” and a “For” line. Since several pages have been lost or reworked, for many parts of the poem we have only either the “Let” lines or the “For” lines without the corresponding pairs. As we shall see below, the poem generates meaning both by “vertical” references (that is, between succeeding “Let” lines and between succeeding “For” lines) and by “horizontal” references (that is, between a “Let” line and its corresponding “For” line.

The fact that the “Let” and “For” lines of the poem were written on separate pages might suggest that it was meant for performance of some kind, by two speakers standing apart from one another, one of whom read a “Let” line, followed by the other, who read the corresponding “For” line. The alternate sounding of irregular length lines, in turn, echoes the performance of psalms and canticles in an Anglican church, and brings us back to the title. Antiphonal psalm and canticle singing of this type can still be heard daily in many cathedrals.

Following this lead, we can deduce that the poetics of the *Jubilate Agno*, its random-seeming line structure, and its repeated invocation of prophets, animals, flowers, and gemstones, are derived from the Psalms of David. At the time Smart was writing, the form of sacred Hebrew poetry had recently been the subject of a study by Robert Lowth in *De Sacra Poesi Hebraorum* (1753). Smart knew the book and after emerging from his confinement approached Lowth to ask for academic support for the publication of his translations of the Psalms, on which he worked alongside the *Jubilate Agno*.

The popularity of the Psalms of David is based on their applicability to the situation of whoever reads or sings them. Although Smart wrote the *Jubilate Agno* in psalm form, the content often appears so intensely personal and so closely attached to the circumstances of his confinement that the sublime poetic language of Hebrew poetry seems odd and out of place. The second line of the pair that provides a high point in Benjamin Britten’s musical setting *Rejoice in the Lamb* is a case in point.

> Let Elkanah rejoice with Cymindis – the Lord illuminate us against the powers of darkness.
> *For the officers of the peace are at variance with me, and the watchman smites me with his staff.*
>
> (B90)

Yet, as Karina Williamson points out in her edition of the poem (1984), Elkanah was the doorkeeper of the Ark, and Cymindis the night hawk. We might thus read from the “Let” line something about personal safety at night in London, and from the “For” line that Smart had suffered a beating at the hands of the people who were supposed to protect him. In this way, Smart reflects the words of the third collect (prayer) set for Evening Prayer, which reads:

> Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord, and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

But Smart expresses his call to God for help in his own words and, in contrast to the writer of the Book of Common Prayer, in remembrance of his own personal situation.

The use of a personal viewpoint is noticeable throughout the poem and appears to be deliberate. However, it is not simply a quirk of the poet. It follows the practice of Smart's High Anglican congregation. In 1753 Smart had begun to attend service at St. George the Martyr in Queen Square, London. The church was opposite the house of John Sheeles, with whom Smart worked on several popular musical projects in the Marylebone Pleasure Gardens, and the two men were close friends of William Stukeley, the incumbent from 1747 to 1765. Stukeley and his congregation made up most of London's remaining "non-juring" High Anglicans. Non-jurors were originally characterized by their refusal to swear the oath of allegiance to William III and Mary II, who had replaced the Catholic King James II after the Glorious Revolution in 1689. This is not to say that Stukeley and his flock were crypto-Catholics, but rather that they strongly maintained the Catholic practice of passive obedience to divinely inspired authority. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the question of whose authority was divinely inspired had shifted its focus from the monarchy to which scriptures were the closest to those used by the first church, and who had the power to express their sublime religious truths. While the first of these questions remained a matter for debate, the second was answered emphatically: only an ordained minister could say the words of the services effectively.

Such an exclusive outlook might seem to overrule the possibility of private prayer, including the type of private devotion that is the *Jubilate Agno*. And in one sense it does. No prayers, according to this belief-system, could reach God without the intercession of an ordained minister. But recognition of this did not preclude devotees from preparing themselves for service, or maintaining their watch over their behavior after service, with prayers in their own words, when there was no minister to utter the divinely inspired formulas. The idea was to pray continuously – a practice begun by Robert Nelson (founder of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge), and explained in his *A Companion to the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England* (1704). It was a practice for which Smart was well known, as noted by his friends Samuel Johnson and Hester Thrale Piozzi. But, as Johnson said, Smart's praying was "not noxious to society," and since it was the common practice of the large congregation at St. George the Martyr, it should not be taken as a sign of religious mania.

Thus we can read the *Jubilate Agno* as Smart's preparation for, and self-maintenance outside, religious service. During his years in the asylum such preparation and self-maintenance might have gone on for some time, since there is no record of there being a chapel at the asylum in which he was kept after 1759, and there would be no Sunday outings to church from what amounted to a private prison. His poem, therefore, takes the form of a psalm, but is not itself a psalm, since it is personally and not divinely inspired. To return to the title, we may consequently gloss the decision to replace the word *deo* with *agno* as a reflection of Smart's belief-system. David can rejoice in God, since he writes with divine inspiration. Smart rejoices in the Lamb,

which is an earthly reference to Jesus, who is the human form of God, from whom he gets his human inspiration.

*

The question of human inspiration is taken up in the first three lines of the *Jubilate Agno*:

> Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
> Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.
> Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together.
> (A1–3)

For Smart, to praise God from a human perspective is to be alive, to breathe in: literally, to inspire. His method of worship is, therefore, everyday, secular, and material. You praise God merely by living and breathing. It is by the awareness of such all-but-unnoticed acts as breathing that one engages in self-examination and monitoring of one's actions. On the contrary, in *Jubilate Deo* we are divinely inspired: "it is he [God] that hath made us, and not we ourselves." Thus, the psalmist admonishes us to "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving," "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting" (Ps. 100: 3–5). This is because divinely inspired "thanksgiving" allows the ordained speaker and his congregation directly to enter God's house (heaven) and receive his mercy. The divinely inspired may speak to and of God. The human must speak to and of the human, and out of human experience.

If all this seems rather a theological quibble to the modern reader, we might remember Alexander Pope's contemporary warning in his *Essay on Man* (1734): "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; / The proper study of Mankind is Man" (ii. 1–2). The lines are consonant in theme and detail with Smart. Smart met Pope in 1742, two years before Pope's death, and took him as a model for his career as a poet.

Nevertheless, when we are confronted with the next three lines from Fragment A of the *Jubilate Agno*, Smart's "proper study of Mankind" still appears opaque:

> Let Noah and his company approach the throne of Grace, and do homage to the Ark of their Salvation.
> Let Abraham present a Ram, and worship the God of his Redemption.
> Let Isaac, the Bridegroom, kneel with his Camels, and bless the hope of his pilgrimage.
> (A4–6)

However, if we consider another peculiarity of Smart's non-juring High Anglicanism, things become a little clearer. William Stukeley listed in his commonplace book a divine hierarchy, which reads: "Pater, Filius, Spiritus, Seraphim, Cherubim, Throm, Dominationon, Virtutos, Protostratos, Principatus, Archangeli, Angli (Gabriel,

Raphael), Lucifer, Beelzebub, Homo, Quadrupos, Serpens, Zoophyta, Pisces, Avos, Insecta, Ignis, Aor, Aqua, Metalla, Lapides." In this list we move without a break between the divine and the earthly, from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through the ranks of archangels and angels (including the fallen angels, Lucifer and Beelzebub) directly to man, four-footed beasts, snakes, sensitive plants, fish, birds, insects, fire, air, water, metals and stones. In setting out this single sequence, Stukeley demonstrates a belief in an unbroken order of things. In turn, this requires a belief that everything is equally part of God's creation, and so important in its peculiar way. Stukeley himself was renowned for his "Vegetable Sermons," which he gave yearly at St. George the Martyr, financed by his father-in-law, a market gardener. Stukeley was also a cat-lover, and mentions several feline friends in his diaries.

Against this background, Smart's repeated call to prophets and other people to stand forth and praise God with an animal, a plant, or a gemstone does not seem so odd. Remembering his line A3, "Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together," we can conclude that for Smart, as for Stukeley, all things created had their specific qualities, and it is these qualities that each line connects with the prophet or person named.

Thus, taking the first of the lines quoted above, "Noah's company" will refer to the pairs of animals rescued from the flood on Noah's Ark, the vast zoo-ship. Their quality as a group lies in the name of their ship, the Ark, which Smart notes anachronistically as "the Ark of their Salvation." Literally, the Ark was the vehicle that saved them from the flood, but, as Karina Williamson notes, "in Christian typology Noah's ark prefigures salvation through Christ." Her reference is to the Gospel of St. Matthew 24: 37, in which we read: "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." That is, the Old Testament story of Noe [Noah] and his Ark full of animals is used in the New Testament as a metaphor for Christ and the gathering of people whom he saves. The particular quality of the Ark of animals is their having been saved by coming together under one roof at the bidding of God. From their example, readers could learn that they too need to be saved by joining together at "the throne of Grace . . . [to] do homage." Smart is writing in his own words, rather than repeating the divinely inspired words of the Bible or the Book of Common Prayer, in order that people could learn, outside divine service, from the example of the animals in Noah's Ark.

From the general we move to the specific in the next line of the passage quoted above (A5), where Abraham is paired with a ram. Smart's reference here is to Genesis 22, where Abraham is tempted by God's command to sacrifice to him his only son, Isaac, the child of his late years. In the story, an angel of the Lord intercedes just as Abraham is about to kill his son on an altar built on a mountain top, and shows him a ram caught in a thicket by its horns: "and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for the burnt offering in the stead of his son" (22: 13). The quality of the ram caught by its horns is its masculine pride, which has brought about its downfall. Through this, Smart draws attention to the point of the story. Abraham, who wanted a son more than anything, became a victim to his masculine pride – the

pride of being a founder of a new generation – and so God asked for the life of his son, the sign of this pride. Abraham was just like the ram, caught by the symbol of his masculinity: the horns for the ram, a son for the man. What the reader may learn from the line is that to achieve redemption, one must confront one's innermost motives. In the case of Abraham, God's temptation is meant to make him ask whether Isaac is important for his own sake, or is to be sacrificed at the altar of his father's pride. In the case of the reader, the lesson is to ask the same question of anything for which one has yearned and that has finally been granted. Is it wanted for its own sake, or as a sign of personal pride?

The third line of the sequence from the quote above (A6) demonstrates the "vertical" relationships between lines. We move from Abraham to Isaac, the beloved son, who as Bridegroom is paired with camels. The story of Isaac that provides the reference to his marriage and the camels (Genesis 24 and 25) also tells of Abraham's reward for accepting his son for his own sake (from A5). Old and on the point of dying, Abraham sent his servant back to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac. The servant took ten camels with him as a gift for the family from which the bride was chosen. The servant chose Rebekah, since she offered water to him and the camels. The quality of the camels, to which the line draws attention, lies in the generosity of Abraham in giving them for the benefit of his son. The story shows that Abraham has learned his lesson, and now accepts Isaac for who he is, not merely as a sign of his fatherly masculine pride. Abraham's reward comes after Isaac is married, when he, who before was on the point of dying, marries again, and has six more sons: that is, he founds a new generation. Nevertheless, in remembrance of his former pride, he leaves all he has to Isaac.

From the analysis of these three lines we can see a development of the lessons which may be learned. We are taught how to read the lines in A4, that is, we are told we must bring Old Testament lessons up to date and use them as metaphors for contemporary problems. In A5 we are given a specific lesson about pride, and in A6 we find out how we are rewarded for following the rule. But this does not exhaust the meaning of the lines. We might equally well read A6 to have a contemporary reference to Smart's own situation.

To have been spirited away into an asylum without a lengthy court case, Smart must have been incarcerated at the command of a senior member of his family. I have argued elsewhere that this was most likely to have been his father-in-law, the publisher John Newbery. Thus, another reading of the line would have Smart as the bridegroom, since he was married to John Newbery's step-daughter Anna Maria Carnan, an act which indirectly caused his incarceration. In this case, the quality of the camel that was being expressed would be that this animal can survive without water for a long time. A lesson might therefore be learned by Smart himself from the camel. While he was on his "pilgrimage" in the asylum he had no chance of going to church for spiritual refreshment; so he must learn from the camel's ability for self-refreshment.

Indeed, there are at least two contextual ways to read each line of *Jubilate Agno*, one from biblical reference, and the other from contemporary reference. The interplay between them is read most easily with reference to the "horizontal" relationships between the "Let" and "For" lines of the poem. If we turn to Fragment B, lines 3 and 4, we can see the way in which the biblical and contemporary become inextricably linked.

> Let Shelumiel rejoice with Olor, who is of a goodly savour, and the very look of him harmonizes the mind.
> *For my existimation is good even amongst the slanderers and my memory shall arise for a sweet savour unto the Lord.*
> Let Jael rejoice with the Plover, who whistles for his live, and foils the marksmen and their guns.
> *For I bless the PRINCE of PEACE and pray that all the guns may be nail'd up, save such as are for the rejoicing days.*

Williamson's notes direct us to the biblical links between Shelumiel and Olor, the Latin word for swan. Shelumiel was noted in Numbers 7: 38 for the sacrificial offering to the temple of a spoon of ten shekels' weight, full of incense. The quality of the swan, which brings about the connection with Shelumiel, is an internal pun between its Latin name, *olor*, and the Latin for "to smell" or "a smell," *olere*. Incense smells when burned, and the name of the swan also suggests smell. Smart then connects Shelumiel and the swan, with the idea that to look at a swan can harmonize the mind, which, presumably, is the same reason for Shelumiel's incense sacrifice to God. The internal pun on the Latin word for "swan" combines the two ways to peace of mind.

The paired "For" line gives a contemporary reference to Smart and his captivity, but to understand it we must find out the meaning of the neologism "existimation." The "horizontal" reference with the "Let" line we have just discussed gives us the method for working it out: like *olor/olere* it is an internal pun. If we break up the word "existimation" into its components, we find "estimation" and "exist." Reading the rest of the line with this in mind, we can deduce that Smart is anxious that his reputation (the "estimation" in which people hold him) would survive (continue to "exist") despite the slander that put him in the madhouse. The addition of the clause "my memory shall arise for a sweet savour unto the Lord" reminds us of the *olor/olere* Latin pun. It also draws our attention to the fact that the Latin word *existimatio*, from which Smart has created the neologism, means "reputation." The double reference would seem to guarantee the fact that we are correct in our reading of the line.

In the second pair of lines, the contemporary reference to Smart's imprisonment is much stronger. The "Let" line connects Jael with the whistling plover. Once again, we find a common quality – in this case, subterfuge – between the biblical character and the animal. Jael used subterfuge to kill Sisera. She called him into her tent when he was escaping from the Israelite army, saying he would

be safe; but while he was asleep there, she killed him by knocking a nail through his temple (Judges 4). Likewise, as Williamson notes, the whistling plover is known for its subterfuge, in the form of aerobatics, which make it an elusive target for guns.

The "For" line requires detailed knowledge of contemporary history. Just before the date on which the line was written, Britain celebrated the double felicity of the twenty-first birthday of Prince George of Wales (who became George III the next year) and the birth of his son (who died in infancy). The celebrations, comprising military parades and other shows of martial strength, were noted in the newspapers (especially the *London Gazette*) throughout June 1759. However, the same papers also printed proclamations that not enough volunteers had joined the militia or navy to supply the army for the Seven Years War (1756–63). One such proclamation was made by the Earl of Darlington, Henry Vane, who had been Smart's benefactor while he was at Cambridge University. The fact that it was dated from Raby Castle, where Smart spent his youth, must have been particularly poignant.

The "Let" line, and the pair of lines that precede it, reflect these events – with reference, moreover, to the reason for Smart's incarceration, namely, political journalism in favor of William Pitt. The Seven Years War was a disaster for the weak Prime Minister, the Duke of Newcastle, and by 1757 Pitt had assumed power. From as early as 1751, Smart had run a stage show and associated magazine (called "Mrs. Mary Midnight's Concert and Oratory," and *The Midwife*) which disseminated a covert anti-Newcastle message. On many occasions Mary Midnight urged action against Spain and France, and ridiculed the ministry of Newcastle and his brother Henry Pelham. But anti-government propaganda was dangerous. Furthermore, the theater licensing laws meant that it was impossible to perform political plays. To get around official censorship, Smart resorted to the subterfuge of presenting a joke musical, in which spoof musical items (such as Signor Bombasto, who played a broomstick with a cello bow) were interspersed with long introductions that were vehicles for satire of current political events.

Thus we have the quality of "subterfuge" returning in the "For" line, which, in turn, inverts the line's apparent meaning.

> *For I bless the* PRINCE *of* PEACE *and pray that all the guns may be nail'd up, save such as are for the rejoicing.*

Smart apparently shows approval for the military elements of the celebrations for the birth of the new prince, and the birthday of his father. However, the reference to the guns being nailed up suggests (by reference to the connection made in the "Let" line between nails and subterfuge) that this show of strength might be itself a subterfuge, since it belied the actual fact of the army being unable to reach its full complement. The satirical attack on people's refusal to fight does not erase the straightforward meaning of the line: a hope for peace, when guns can be locked away. However, it remains possible that Smart was also jokingly suggesting that the army, in its reduced

strength, would have to employ the subterfuge of the plover to avoid the gunfire of the enemy and win the war.

A polymath such as Smart was never short of topics on which to write, even when short of books to read; he was always able to keep his mind active with current problems. One such problem was the recent news of the atheism of Sir Isaac Newton's scientific method. In his inimitable way, Smart approached the problem of Newton and religion from the point of view of his cat, Jeoffry.

It can be no surprise that the High Anglican Smart was cautious about accepting the views of Sir Isaac Newton in the light of the revelation about his unorthodoxy. He makes ambivalent mention of the scientist three times in the *Jubilate Agno*:

> *For* CHASTITY *is the key to knowledge as in Esdras, Sr Isaac Newton and now, God be praised, in me.*
> *For Newton nevertheless is more of error than of truth, but I am of the* WORD *of* GOD*.*
> (B194–5)

> Let Barsabas rejoice with Cammarus – Newton is ignorant for if a man consult not the WORD how should he understand the WORK?
> (B220)

After the affirmation of B194 that they share the key to knowledge, Smart's use of the comparative "more of error" in B195 nevertheless suggests that there might be an element of truth still to be found in Newton's work. The supposition is confirmed by the first part of B220. Cammarus is a kind of sea-crab, shrimp, or prawn. The reference to it in Pliny displays its peculiar quality. In his *Natural History* Pliny describes the shape of the root of the aconite plant as "like the Cammarus." Typically, the section on aconite describes its use as a remedy; however, as the plant is highly toxic, Pliny prefixes his statement with some words of assurance: "there is no evil without some admixture of good . . ." Thus the shellfish-like shape of the aconite root mutely indicates that the plant has a beneficial use beneath its "carapace" of poison. In the same way, Newton may have some evil ideas, but some good is mixed in with them.

To Smart, Newton's evil lay in his famous argument against the Trinity and the divinity of Christ in his *Two Letters to Mr. Le Clerc*, which were published posthumously in 1754. In the first of these, Newton argued the Arian heresy (that is, Christ was not divine) against the Athanasian orthodoxy of the Anglican Church, on the grounds that the Greek Testaments were altered by Tertullian, Cyprian, and Jerome on translation into Latin. He pointed out that "by the unanimous consent of all the ancient and faithful interpreters, which we have hitherto met with (who doubtless made use of the best Manuscripts they could get) the Testimony of 'the Three in Heaven' was not anciently in the Greek." Newton's denial of the Trinity takes the form of eighty pages of closely argued textual scholarship and bears witness to the claim that he was an "excellent Divine." However, it required sight of particular books and bibles in libraries from all over Europe to demonstrate the inconsistencies in various editors' marginalia. As there is no evidence that Newton ever traveled to

see the books he cited, Smart's comment that "Newton is ignorant" may refer to the fact that he did not "consult . . . the WORD": that is, have empirical proof, from the annotated texts themselves, of the assertions he made. The importance of having direct access is borne out by Smart's dislike of accented Greek:

> *For the ACCENTS are the invention of the Moabites, who learning the GREEK tongue marked the words after their own vicious pronuntiation.*
>
> (B398)

Newton used accents, and based the argument of his second letter to Le Clerc, that Christ is not divine, on a misreading of an accent in the first letter of Timothy:

> What the Latins have done for the Text of the First Epistle of Saint JOHN, v.7. the Greeks have done to that of St. Paul's First Epistle to TIMOTHY, iii.16. For by changing *ὅ* into Θ*C*, the Abbreviation of Theos, they now read, "Great is the Mistery of Godliness: GOD was manifest in the Flesh." Whereas all the Churches for the first four or five hundred years; and the authors of all the ancient versions, Jerome as well as the rest, read "Great is the Mistery of Godliness, which was manifested in the Flesh."

The misreading could not occur in the unaccented Greek which Smart preferred, and the divinity of Christ would not be doubted had the texts Newton studied followed this preference. The first portion of the line B220 which denounces Newton, "Let Barsabas rejoice with Cammarus –," adds to the suggestion that Smart thought Newton wrong in his belief that Jesus is not divine. Barsabas was the surname of Joseph (or Judas or Justus) who was chosen, with Matthias, to be ordained as an apostle, being a witness to Christ's resurrection in Acts 1: 23.

Stukeley, if he knew of it, was undeterred by Newton's Arianism and located modern science within the Mosaic Bible following the non-disjunctive hierarchy we saw above:

> When we look at the Works of the Hebrew Lawgiver particularly the First Chapter of Genesis, if it be not the oldest Writing in the World yet it must needs be acknowledgd the first & only one that gives an exact & intelligible, a strictly Philosophical Account of the Generation of the World & all the Creatures in it, Moses cannot be accounted less than Gods Natures Secretary. who admires not the plainness & yet the Majesty of his Narration, the Dignity of his Stile the Conciseness of his Expression peculiar to the Easterns, being we are assured tis dictated from the Same Spirit that made the World, its Veracity is unquestionable the most genuine & natural Account of the Great Truths it delivers cannot be accounted any less than most pure & incorrupt streams issuing from the fountain of all knowledg. Here is the Original Source of True philosophy The Oracle of Nature The Springhead of knowledge Where Those that thirst after the NEWTONIAN Draughts may drink largely at the Fountain.

The elision between Newton and Moses was possible since, for Stukeley, no separation existed between the divine and the created worlds. In this view, it was senseless

to argue that Christ is or is not divine. His theology enabled him to accept Newton, and to remain true to the Trinitarian orthodoxy of the Church of England. Likewise, Smart wrote in *Jubilate Agno* that he was trying to "defend the philosophy of scripture against vain deceit" by being "inquisitive of the Lord" (B130). Thus, we may see Smart rescuing part of Newton's work in a Stukelian model of the universe where Christ is the begotten aspect of the divine.

We can see Smart's begrudging adoption of Newton's empiricism as he reintegrates it into his form of Christianity in the extended section on his cat, Jeoffry. These lines derive from Smart's empirical experience as they tell us of Jeoffry's daily behavior. Empirically, Jeoffry wakes (B698), washes himself (B702–10), meets other cats (B714), catches mice (B715–16), and plays (B746–8). Smart also uses Jeoffry for experiments with electricity (B760), but these observations are punctuated by references to the divine. Thus Jeoffry wakes:

> *For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.*
> (B697)

Jeoffry washes himself:

> *For having done duty and received blessing he begins to consider himself.*
> (B701)

Then Jeoffry goes out into the world:

> For having consider'd God and himself he will consider his neighbour.
> (B713)

The cat's morning routine is given meaning by its complementary relationship with God:

> *For he knows that God is his Saviour.*
> (B737)

Simple empiricism is not enough, however, to complete the meaning of all Jeoffry's actions. The inductions from observation need to be redeemed by spiritual deduction: the human and his cat are qualified by the divine. However, access to the divine language is not possible; thus the observations of Jeoffry are set against a series of satellite references to cats in classics and mythology from which to deduce his "catness":

> For he is of the tribe of Tiger.
> *For the Cherub Cat is a term of the Angel Tiger.*
> (B722–3)

> *For he is hated by the hypocrite and miser.*
> (B751)

For he made a great figure in Egypt for his signal services.
(B756)

Thus, as in Stukeley's references between the Bible and classical philosophers, other earthly sources or languages are also employed to guarantee the empirical observation.

In this essay, we have seen how Smart's poetry works contextually, from the level of the line to references between lines and, finally, to whole sections that discuss larger topics. What is most important about this method of reading Smart's *Jubilate Agno* is that we approach it from the point of view that the meanings and references of every word need to be traced back to their likely sources. These may be contemporary, biblical, or scientific, and only when a number of the sources have been discovered will the complexities of the lines become clearer. If space permitted we could look further into the poem to see how whole fragments (in particular Fragment C) produce meaning on an even grander scale. What is perhaps the most startling aspect of the poem is how it teaches the reader the methods of its own decipherment; but this demands careful study of each line. And there is still plenty more work to be done.

See also chs. 4, "Poetry and Religion"; 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm."

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22

Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*, and George Crabbe, *The Village*

Caryn Chaden

Towards the end of Oliver Goldsmith's career, and at the very start of George Crabbe's, both men launched critiques on the dire effects of England's expanding economy on the rural poor. They shared the view that the economic growth that helped London flourish from the Restoration through the eighteenth century had sapped rural villages of resources and widened the gap between rich and poor. Both writers came from poor families, and both spent their youth in rural areas – Goldsmith in Lissoy, Ireland, and Crabbe in Aldeburgh, Suffolk – before seeking their fortunes in London. Both writers, too, brought conventions of Augustan poetry to bear on their subject, not only heroic couplets but a whole tradition of pastorals, georgics, and anti-pastorals. Yet for all their similarities, any discussion of *The Deserted Village* (1770) and *The Village* (1783) inevitably begins with the contrast between the "sentimentalism" of Goldsmith's poem and the "realism" of Crabbe's. For even though both poems describe current rural life in bleak detail, Goldsmith opens with an idyllic account of the village before its destruction by modern forces, whereas Crabbe objects to such sentimentalizing and focuses squarely on the hard life of labor the poor must inevitably endure.

Goldsmith begins *The Deserted Village* with his speaker's fond memories of the "Sweet Auburn" of his youth:

> How often have I paused on every charm,
> The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
> The never failing brook, the busy mill,
> The decent church that topt the neighbouring hill,
> The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,
> For talking age and whispering lovers made.
> (ll. 9–14)

Nature and cultivation, work and respite, youth and age – all come together here to create a harmonious life characterized by balance and order, providing structure,

shelter, and contentment. For Goldsmith, Auburn represents an idealized time in both his own life and the life of the village. He uses some form of the word "charm" four times in the 34-line opening description to heighten Auburn's lyrical, magical quality – a mood abruptly broken by the harsh monosyllabic turn at the end of the section: "These were thy charms – But all these charms are fled" (l. 34). The village's decline becomes at once a personal and a public loss.

What has doomed rural life, Goldsmith contends, is the rise of trade that has brought unprecedented wealth to some few at the expense of the many:

> Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore,
> And shouting Folly hails them from her shore;
> Hoards, even beyond the miser's wish abound,
> And rich men flock from all the world around.
> Yet count our gains. This wealth is but a name
> That leaves our useful products still the same.
> Not so the loss. The man of wealth and pride,
> Takes up a space that many poor supplied;
> Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,
> Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds;
> The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth,
> Has robbed the neighbouring fields of half their growth;
> His seat, where solitary sports are seen,
> Indignant spurns the cottage from the green;
> Around the world each needful product flies,
> For all the luxuries the world supplies.
> While thus the land adorned for pleasure all
> In barren splendour feebly waits the fall.
>
> (ll. 269–86)

Trade leads to the accumulation of luxury goods and, more dangerous still, to the acquisition of land. Rich men, bent on building lavish residences, force out local residents and uncaringly destroy rural communities. The result, Goldsmith contends, is a mighty "fall" – a village deserted by its people, its values, and, in the end, by Poetry itself.

George Crabbe shares Goldsmith's view that commerce has done nothing for the poor, but he refuses to take refuge in nostalgia. In what appears to be a direct response to Goldsmith, who identifies "the sheltered cot" as one of Auburn's charms, Crabbe proclaims, "I paint the cot, / As truth will paint it, and as bards will not" (i. 53–4). Rosy pictures of rural life are based on fantasy, not reality. If the Muses "sing of happy swains," they do so only "Because the Muses never knew their pains" (i. 22) And such fantasy, Crabbe suggests, demonstrates a lack of respect for the people described in the poem: "O'ercome by labour and bow'd down by time, / Feel you the barren flattery of a rhyme?" (i. 57–8).

For Crabbe, the "truth" about rural life for the poor is that it is hard and dominated by labor. From the start, then, he sets out a different course:

> The village life, and every care that reigns
> O'er youthful peasants and declining swains;
> What labour yields, and what, that labour past,
> Age, in its hour of languor, finds at last;
> What forms the real picture of the poor,
> Demands a song – the Muse can give no more.
> (i. 1–6)

With this opening salvo, Crabbe begins the dialogue that continues to frame the contrast between these two poems. The "real picture of the poor" is not an easy one to paint or view, he contends, but it demands his attention with the force of a moral imperative:

> I grant indeed that fields and flocks have charms,
> For him that gazes or for him that farms;
> But when amid such pleasing scenes I trace
> The poor laborious natives of the place,
> And see the mid-day sun, with fervid ray,
> On their bare heads and dewy temples play;
> While some, with feebler hands and fainter hearts,
> Deplore their fortune, yet sustain their parts,
> Then shall I dare these real ills to hide,
> In tinsel trappings of poetic pride?
> (i. 40–9)

These lines can be read as a gloss on Stephen Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* (1736), a poem that depicted in graphic detail the demanding work of planting, harvesting, and threshing grain year after year on his uncaring employer's farm. '[H]onest DUCK' (i. 27) is the only poet Crabbe credits with offering a realistic portrayal of rural life. [*See* ch. 15, "STEPHEN DUCK, *THE THRESHER'S LABOUR*, AND MARY COLLIER, *THE WOMAN'S LABOUR*."] If Goldsmith portrayed the rich displacing the poor, Crabbe, like Duck, goes farther to characterize their relationship as one of master to slave. To landowning readers who might argue that hard outdoor work leads to sturdy good health, Crabbe counters that the rural laborers' constant exposure to the vicissitudes of heat and rain shortens their lifespan: "Then own that labour may as fatal be / To these thy slaves, as thine excess to thee" (i. 152–3).

In contrast to Goldsmith's envy of the aging laborer who "crowns . . . [a] youth of labour with an age of ease" (ll. 99–100), Crabbe laments the universal taunts that will greet him when he is too enfeebled to work any longer. Whereas Goldsmith's elderly poor meet their end with dignified independence, Crabbe's aged laborer ends up in the poorhouse, "left alone to die" (i. 259). To Crabbe, these bleak details represent "the real Picture of the Poor" far better than any idealized portrait of "Sweet Auburn."

From the time of its publication, Crabbe's poem was praised as a convincing critique of Goldsmith's sentimentalized portrayal of village life (Lutz 1998: 184).

Goldsmith's case was not helped by the fact that his views of depopulation were found to be inaccurate, for it turned out that while enclosure lessened the number of farms, it increased the quantity of food that was produced and so led to an increase in population (Barfoot 1982: 213). One might think, then, that Crabbe's *The Village* would have displaced Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* in the canon; but that is not the case. On the contrary, Goldsmith's poem is anthologized more often and is the subject of far more modern criticism than Crabbe's. *The Deserted Village* continues to be read because it remains a powerful representation of one man's response to change – both social and literary. It is Goldsmith's personal response to change, not the accuracy of his view of village demographics, that continues to evoke interest. At the same time, Crabbe's bold claims to social veracity have themselves been subjected to close scrutiny. Any initial contrast between the "sentimental" quality of Goldsmith's poem and the "realism" of Crabbe's must give way to a more complex analysis of the views embedded in each poet's account and the poetic conventions that shape their expression.

Views of the Poor

Goldsmith may have been wrong about rural depopulation, but the fundamental change in England's economy that he saw driving changes in society was real. As Howard Bell Jr. persuasively argued as early as 1944, "*The Deserted Village* must . . . be recognized as a document inspired by the amazing development of trade from the Restoration up to Goldsmith's own day, a development which we call the commercial revolution" (p. 749). Goldsmith was hardly alone in responding to this development; indeed, the impact of trade on English life is a central theme of eighteenth-century literature [*see* ch. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"]. In numerous *Tatler* and *Spectator* essays, Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and *Epistle to Burlington. Of the Use of Riches*, Leapor's "Crumble-Hall," Hume's "On Luxury," and Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, to name only a few, we find writers working to identify the line between the welcome benefits of prosperity and the dangers of excess, between "necessity" and mere "luxury." While most focus on the impact of these excesses on the moral life of the rich themselves, Goldsmith explores the impact of the wealthy's excesses on the poor. He thus asks his readers to consider the interdependence of different classes within the village and, ultimately, within the nation as a whole. After describing comforting scenes that displaced villagers have been forced to leave behind (ll. 363–84), Goldsmith's speaker laments:

> O luxury! Thou curst by heaven's decree,
> How ill exchanged are things like these for thee!
> How do thy potions with insidious joy,
> Diffuse their pleasures only to destroy!
> Kingdoms by thee, to sickly greatness grown,

Boast of a florid vigour not their own.
At every draught more large and large they grow,
A bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe;
Till sapped their strength, and every part unsound,
Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin round.
(ll. 385–94)

The destruction of Auburn becomes a symbol for the impending destruction of the nation. Like an intoxicating drug, "luxury" leads ultimately to a bloated, sickly, weakened body politic. The inevitable outcome of such misplaced priorities, Goldsmith fears, would be that England, like Rome before it, would fall.

Some readers have attributed to Goldsmith's poem a "radical politics," both in its criticism of the wealthy and in its sympathetic portrayal of the poor. Several eighteenth-century writers – among them William Blake and Thomas Paine – saw a utopian ideal in Goldsmith's portrayal of the Auburn of the past and viewed his depiction of Auburn's devastation as a critique on contemporary economic policy (Lutz 1998: 184–5). More recently, scholars have noted Goldsmith's portrayal of villagers engaged in both work and leisure activities, suggesting that the poor, like the rich, have some say in how they spend their time (Barrell 1980: 65–82). With his references to the Enclosure Acts of the 1750s and 1760s, which eliminated common grazing areas by allowing landowners to fence in their farms, and to England's trading practices, Goldsmith suggests that it is failures of public policy, rather than of personal morality, that have led to Auburn's destruction.

However, it is a mistake to view any political agenda embedded in *The Deserted Village* as especially progressive. Goldsmith was a Tory; his opposition to the liberal trading practices favored by the Whigs grew out of a conservative agenda in which a stable social hierarchy was essential to the nation's well-being. Indeed, his idealized character sketches of past Auburn villagers reveal an ordered social system in which the teacher's knowledge appears a "wonder" (l. 215) because so few people are educated (ll. 193–217), and the preacher works strictly within the Anglican Church, doling out charity in a paternalistic way (ll. 163–76). As Vincent Newey concludes, "Goldsmith's portraits are informed by the same ideology of fixed relations that is recalled in . . . Pope's *Essay on Man*" (Newey 1998: 100).

Crabbe, too, combines sympathy for the plight of the poor with fairly conservative assumptions about society's structure. On the one hand, he draws attention to the unhealthy and often degrading conditions facing rural laborers, and thus implicitly indicts those who allow such conditions to persist. His portrayal of the poorhouse, in particular, criticizes a society that, since the reign of Queen Elizabeth, had established laws to ensure that the poor would be cared for, but had failed to act on its promise (Hatch 1976: 20–3):

Such is that room which one rude beam divides,
And naked rafters form the sloping sides;
Where the vile bands that bind the thatch are seen,

And lath and mud are all that lie between;
Save one dull pane, that, coarsely patch'd, gives way
To the rude tempest, yet excludes the day:
Here, on a matted flock, with dust o'erspread,
The drooping wretch reclines his languid head;
For him no hand the cordial cup applies,
Or wipes the tear that stagnates in his eyes;
No friends with soft discourse his pain beguile,
Or promise hope till sickness wears a smile.
(i. 262–73)

In the first eight lines here, Crabbe observes the building's flimsy construction, which only barely separates the "drooping wretch" from the tempest outside, leaving the man as "naked" as the rafters that surround him. With the last four lines, in contrast, he evokes an imaginary scene of what should be there but isn't: care and attention in his dying days, if not from his "friends," then at least from the institutions charged with his care. Nowhere in this passage does Crabbe explicitly call for change; instead, throughout Part I of *The Village*, he relies on unsparing detail to evoke sympathy, if not outrage.

In Part II of *The Village*, however, Crabbe changes his emphasis. He opens with a view of village life on the Sabbath day, "Heaven's gift to weary men oppress't" (ii. 27). Yet after fewer than twenty lines describing "gleams of transient mirth and hours of sweet repose," Crabbe devotes the next fifty lines to a litany of "village vices" that drive any joy away: drunkenness, wife-beating, slander, promiscuity (ii. 33–85). Crabbe argues that he relates "these humble crimes" in order "To show the great, those mightier sons of pride, / How near in vice the lowest are allied . . . So shall the man of power and pleasure see / In his own slaves as vile a wretch as he" (ii. 87, 89–94). Rich and poor are equal not only in death, but in their capacity for vice. Yet critics such as John Barrell have argued that Crabbe's focus on only two areas of the laboring life – either work or criminal dissipation – compromise his claim to objective description. The poem advances "a prescription: the poor must be shown at work, not only because that is what they do, but because that is what they ought to do" (Barrell 1980: 77).

If Part I of *The Village* shows a sympathy for the laboring poor unprecedented in Augustan literature, Part II shares the same dark view of flawed humanity as those canonical Augustan works, Pope's *Dunciad* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Problems in society originate in the corrupt actions of individuals, not from systemic inequities; thus the remedy is to be found in moral improvement rather than in public policy. Just as Pope's *Of the Characters of Women* and *Epistle to Burlington* open with a series of negative portraits countered by one concluding model of a righteous individual worthy of emulation, so Crabbe ends *The Village* with his ninety-line elegy to Robert Manners, son of his patron, the Duke of Rutland, who died in a naval battle in 1782 (Hatch 1976: 32–3): "Like Manners walk, who walk'd in honour's way" (ii. 148). This conclusion has struck many readers as inadequate (Chamberlain 1965: 34–5).

Crabbe may well describe the poor with a level of realistic detail until then rarely seen in poetry, but his poem is hardly designed to help readers imagine a change in the social order. At best, *The Village* acknowledges the plight of the poor in order to persuade those in authority to take their responsibilities more seriously (Hatch 1976: 10–33).

Thus, despite the sympathy both Goldsmith and Crabbe evoke for the poor, neither *The Deserted Village* nor *The Village* suggests a new way of thinking, let alone a course of action that would give poor people more power in their society. Indeed, the sympathy of both writers remains framed within Augustan assumptions of a fixed social order. At the same time, however, both of these poems reflect changes in the economy that made the possibility of social change more palpable. Indeed, both Goldsmith and Crabbe participated in these developments: they each wrote about rural life after living in London, center not only of trade but of a burgeoning print culture that provided an arena for both men's work – Goldsmith through his friendship with Samuel Johnson, and Crabbe through the patronage of Edmund Burke. Goldsmith may portray an idealized view of "Sweet Auburn," but he never returned to its model, Lissoy in Ireland, once he had left, despite difficulties earning a living as a writer in London. Crabbe expresses no such ambivalence about leaving Aldeburgh, Suffolk; on the contrary, he "Fled from these shores where guilt and famine reign, / And cry'd, Ah! hapless they who still remain" (i. 123–4). After *The Village* was published he returned to Aldeburgh briefly as an ordained curate, but soon was hired as chaplain to a noble family in the vale of Belvoir and went to live in their castle. Precisely because these writers so movingly describe a way of life that each of them left behind, these poems call on us to explore the relationship between these writers and their work.

The Poets and Their Work

The Deserted Village contains numerous indications that this poem is, at least on one level, an autobiographical account of Goldsmith's nostalgia for his childhood home and his grief about the sense of dislocation and financial hardship he experienced after he left (Goldsmith 1966: 277–8). References to the village as "Seats of my youth" (l. 6) and "home" (l. 96) suggest that Auburn stands for Lissoy, while his bleak portrait of the city mirrors his own experience of London: "If to the city sped – What waits him there? / To see profusion that he must not share" (ll. 309–10). From a modern reader's perspective, Goldsmith's first-hand knowledge of the details he describes and his willingness to insert himself into the poem with his repeated use of "I" may provide reassuring grounding for the political argument. For eighteenth-century readers, however, such an approach would have appeared quite novel. Augustan poems with a serious political intent generally followed a different set of conventions from those describing personal experience. In *Windsor-Forest*, for example, Pope's most famous topographical poem, landscape description leads to a survey of England's history and subsequent social commentary. Though Pope grew up near Windsor and knew the

landscape well, the poem focuses far less on his personal emotions than on the landscape as political allegory. In contrast, Goldsmith's poem combines intense personal nostalgia and social polemic. Thus critics have often been divided on the extent to which the poem should be read as personal meditation or as political propaganda. A more useful approach will explore its indebtedness to certain generic conventions and its distinctive place in eighteenth-century literary history.

While Goldsmith's work is clearly embedded in the conventions for Augustan poetry, it also includes some of the self-expressive characteristics that we usually associate with the poetry of Wordsworth or Coleridge (Lonsdale 1978: 7–8). Crabbe viewed Goldsmith's poem as a "pastoral," idealizing the simplicity of rural life, but most critics also see in *The Deserted Village* elements of the "georgic," a type of topographical poem that similarly honors the values of rural life but incorporates realistic detail in order to provide the occasion for explicit social and political commentary (Storm 1970: 243–5). [*See* ch. 29, "The Georgic."] When Goldsmith opens the poem with the speaker's memories of Auburn – "How often have I loitered o'er thy green . . . How often have I paused on every charm" (ll. 7, 9) – he adds a new element to this poetic structure, giving his political argument a personal resonance for readers who are invited to identify with the speaker and share his grief. At the same time, however, Goldsmith's personal approach to his subject gives the poem a psychological dimension that, to some critics, compromises his political stance.

For example, at the site of Auburn's ruined landscape, the speaker's memory of how things used to be "Swells at [his] breast, and turns the past to pain" (l. 82). In the next stanza, however, we find that the real source of his grief is located in the loss of his own imagined future:

> In all my wanderings round this world of care,
> In all my griefs – and God has given my share –
> I still had hopes my latest hours to crown,
> Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;
> To husband out life's taper at the close,
> And keep the flame from wasting by repose.
> I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,
> Amidst the swains to shew my book-learned skill,
> Around my fire an evening groupe to draw,
> And tell of all I felt, and all I saw . . .
> (ll. 83–92)

Here the speaker imagines himself returning home to tell his story and impress an attentive audience. The speaker himself notes the "pride" at the center of this fantasy: his self-awareness gives the whole passage an amiable quality, but one that draws our attention more to the narrator than to the national issues at stake.

Likewise, Goldsmith's diatribe against "luxury" has its own psychological dimension. Critics point to numerous ways in which Goldsmith's imagery reveals his discomfort with change and uncertainty (Barfoot 1987: 117–21). The poem continually

associates the consequences of luxury with a woman's loss of innocence (Lonsdale 1978: 24–5). The changes in Auburn's landscape take on a pitifully seductive quality, the kind of seduction that succeeds only as long as no one looks too closely. Like a once innocent, beautiful woman, who now "shines forth sollicitous to bless, / In all the glaring impotence of dress," the land, "by luxury betrayed," sees "its splendours rise" even as it "verg[es] to decline" (ll. 293–7). The consequences of being seduced by such prospects immediately follows, when a woman who leaves Auburn for the city ends up homeless and ruined: "With heavy heart [she] deplores that luckless hour, / When idly first, ambitious of the town, / She left her wheel and robes of country brown" (ll. 334–6). Goldsmith is certainly not alone in associating the desire for material goods with licentious behavior, but the consequences he imagines become extreme when he describes people leaving the village for America only to confront all manner of exotic dangers, from tornadoes to bats and poisonous snakes inhabiting dark forests, "Where crouching tigers wait their hapless prey / And savage men more murderous still than they" (ll. 355–6). Taken together, passages like these give critics reason to suggest that, in his political argument against the consequences of England's expanding economy, Goldsmith has projected on to the nation the unhappy result of his own attempt to find a better life outside his native village – his own deeply felt experience of loss and extreme uncertainty.

In the poem's final stanza, this connection between private and public loss becomes explicit, as the narrator re-enters the poem: "Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand, / I see the rural virtues leave the land" (ll. 397–8). Chief among these virtues departing on vessels bound for the new world is Poetry, traditionally portrayed as female, and here given the traits of lover, protector, and nurturer all in one:

> Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,
> My shame in crowds, my solitary pride.
> Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe,
> That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so;
> Thou guide by which the nobler arts excell,
> Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well.
> (ll. 411–16)

The poem's pervasive sense of dislocation culminates here in the loss of what the narrator suggests is the source of his own identity: his writing (Newey 1998: 114). Indeed, by the end of the poem Goldsmith disappears altogether, for it is Samuel Johnson who writes the last two couplets offering the poem's final lesson, assuring readers that nature will outlast every empire, "As rocks resist the billows and the sky" (l. 430). And yet at stake here is not only Goldsmith's own ability to write, but a more generalized "Poetry" as Goldsmith understood it – a poetry both reflecting and upholding the Augustan values and stable social hierarchy epitomized in his original portrayal of Sweet Auburn (Lonsdale 1978: 27–8). Goldsmith's farewell to Poetry not only marks the end of a stage in his own life,

but points to the changing conventions in society and in writing that this poet could only begin to imagine.

Crabbe, too, struggles to negotiate between a personal response to his own experience and what he sees as general truths about the common experience of the rural poor. His declared commitment to the "real picture of the poor" suggests clear-eyed objectivity. Yet autobiographical elements shape *The Village* from the outset: Crabbe, "cast by Fortune on a frowning coast, / Which neither groves nor happy vallies boast" (i. 49–50), writes from the experience of a childhood in the impoverished coastal village of Aldeburgh – very different from Goldsmith's warmly hospitable Auburn.

> Lo! Where the heath, with withering brake grown o'er,
> Lends the light turf that warms the neighbouring poor;
> From thence a length of burning sand appears,
> Where the thin harvest waves its wither'd ears;
> Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,
> Reign o'er the land and rob the blighted rye;
> There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,
> And to the ragged infant threaten war;
> There poppies nodding, mock the hope of toil,
> There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil;
> . . .
> With mingled tints the rocky coasts abound,
> And a sad splendor vainly shines around.
>
> (i. 63–78)

The botanical details serve to establish what some have defined as Crabbe's "scientific" approach (McGann 1981: 563). By building his portrait of rural life one observation at a time, Crabbe works like a scientist inductively setting forth an argument based on empirical evidence, which shows that nature is a source of danger rather than of comfort. Rather than encouraging productive labor, its sterile conditions "defy" and even "mock" any hope of farming. This setting, Crabbe implies, stunts the growth not only of its vegetation, but of its inhabitants (Hatch 1976: 14–15):

> Here joyless roam a wild amphibious race,
> With sullen woe display'd on every face;
> Who, far from civil arts and social fly,
> And scowl at strangers with suspicious eye.
>
> (i. 85–8)

Once again, Crabbe's tone is detached and scientific. The villagers of his youth are an "amphibious" species of animal: he notes their facial expressions and behavior in response to their surroundings. With few options for creating a livelihood, the young men turn to the dangerous pursuit of smuggling to survive – "Beneath yon cliff they stand, / To show the freighted pinnace where to land" (i. 101–2). The only way to

avoid that fate himself, Crabbe concludes, is to leave: "So waited I the favouring hour, and fled" (i. 122).

These passages create a compelling portrait of the hard life facing the Aldeburgh villagers. Yet the conditions of life in this coastal village are hardly typical of England as a whole, and so this portrait, by itself, cannot serve as the basis for a more general "picture of the poor" (Edwards 1990: 42). Indeed, Crabbe contrasts this landscape "where Nature's niggard hand / Gave a spare portion to the famish'd land" with "other scenes more fair in view, / Where Plenty smiles" – but then concludes: "alas! she smiles for few" (i. 131–2, 135–6). From this point on, Crabbe's observations about the gap between rich and poor echo Goldsmith's: "those who taste not, yet behold [Plenty's] store, / Are as the slaves that dig the golden ore, / The wealth around them makes them doubly poor" (i. 137–9). Moreover, his approach incorporates numerous conventions of Augustan poetry. Like Gay in *The Shepherd's Week*, or Swift in "A Description of the Morning," Crabbe writes in the tradition of "anti-pastorals," contrasting realistic, often unseemly detail with idealized images of rustic bliss. Yet unlike these poems, Crabbe's tone throughout remains earnest, if sometimes sardonic: it is the very seriousness with which Crabbe approaches his subject that makes *The Village* noteworthy.

The laborer whose life Crabbe chronicles in Part I of *The Village* is presented as a generalized representative of all village laborers, identified not by name but by phrases connecting him with others at the same stage of life: "the youth," "the old, " "the sick," "the wretch," and, finally, "the man of many sorrows [who] sighs no more" (i. 156, 226, 240, 225, 320). At the same time, however, the force of this extended portrait derives from the attention Crabbe gives to features of this man's individual humanity. He contrasts the man's pleasure at recalling his past accomplishments as "chief" among the field hands – "Full many a prize he won, and still is proud / To find the triumphs of his youth allow'd" (i. 190–1) – with the dejection he experiences once he is unable to work:

> "Why do I live, when I desire to be
> "At once from life and life's long labour free?
> . . .
> "A lonely, wretched man, in pain I go,
> "None need my help and none relieve my woe;
> "Then let my bones beneath the turf be laid,
> "And men forget the wretch they would not aid."
> (i. 206–25)

Ironically, this character comes to life most fully through the speech that records his response to being ignored. By giving his character voice in this first-person lament, Crabbe forces his readers to confront the man's feelings of abandonment, and to do so from his own point of view.

Precisely because this character's pain comes across so forcefully in Part I of *The Village*, the conclusion to Part II disappoints. For if Crabbe's aim in offering his elegy

to Robert Manners is to provide a model for readers to emulate, then his laborer certainly met that challenge – but dies neglected nonetheless. As a commentary on the conditions facing the rural poor, Part I of *The Village* is more successful by itself, while Part II reveals the limitations Crabbe faces when he falls back on the conventions of Augustan poetry. In later poems like *The Borough* (1810), *Tales* (1812), and *Tales of the Hall* (1819) Crabbe develops the special strengths of *The Village* – its focus on the details of specific scenes and characters – to create compelling, complex portraits of individual lives.

In the end, the contrast between the "sentimentalism" of Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* and the "realism" of Crabbe's *The Village* is an important starting place for a discussion of these poems, but only a starting place. For the contrast between these writers' approaches to their task is embedded in a shared respect for the conventions and assumptions governing Augustan poetry, and a shared attempt to expand those boundaries sufficiently to fully address the subject that compels them both to write: the widening gap between rich and poor and its impact on rural villages. Goldsmith grounds his social commentary in sentiment arising from personal experience, while Crabbe focuses attention on empirical details not often portrayed in poetry. Both poems thus exhibit powerful new approaches to their task. To the extent that these poems falter, they reveal their authors' limitations in fully creating a new vision. Perhaps more importantly, they reveal the fault lines that separate one set of conventions from another, as Augustan poetry gives way to new forms of expression.

See also chs. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 10, "John Gay, *The Shepherd's Week*"; 15, "Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, and Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*"; 40, "Rural Poetry and the Self-Taught Tradition."

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23
William Cowper, *The Task*

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The "Advertisement" or "history of the following production" that prefaces Cowper's *Task* (1785) ascribes the work's style and initial choice of topic to an anonymous female acquaintance (Lady Austen), who, "fond of blank verse, demanded a poem of that kind from the author, and gave him the SOFA for a subject." Abiding by a mock-chivalric code that, while it may have compelled him to "obey" such a whimsical command, also permitted him to do so at his "leisure," Cowper outlines the poem's loose, associative structure in biographically inviting terms: "He . . . connected another subject with [the sofa]; and pursuing the train of thought to which his situation and turn of mind led him, brought forth at length, instead of the trifle which he at first intended, a serious affair – a Volume" (Advertisement, in Cowper 1995: 113).

This way of phrasing it allows him to maintain that the seriousness of *The Task* may be no more than a question of size, while at the same time insinuating that the work is no trifling matter. The slipshod manner of the poem's emergence in its present form – as if Cowper's wandering, pregnant mind has accidentally produced earnest, directed offspring – forms part of a typically coy self-appraisal, one that only indirectly aspires to literary purpose. "Brought forth at length . . . a Volume" is also the first of many references in *The Task* to the conception, gestation, and growth to polite or corrupt maturity of literature, nations, and individuals (see e.g. i. 17, 23; ii. 581, 637, 708; iii. 144, 196, 318, 432–3, 436, 464, 502; iv. 280–1). The judicious or degenerate "leisure" of the author's "situation," implied by Lady Austen's elected subject, remains in dialog with the redemptive labor of writing throughout the poem.

So Cowper's "Advertisement" initiates a series of tensions: between inspiration and execution, a high style and a low subject, a brief, light "trifle" and a lengthy, serious "Volume," static "leisure" and active "task," fixed "situation" and mobile "turn of mind." His work might lay claim, like Laurence Sterne's, to being both circular and linear, "digressive, and . . . progressive too – and at the same time" (Sterne 1981: 95). It is not surprising, then, that *The Task* reveals such an attraction for the word "still," with its simultaneous perpetuations and arrests of movement, its impulses

toward ambition and quietude, hunger and satiety, expansion and contraction: "Still soothing and of power to charm me still"; "And still they dream that they shall still succeed, / And still are disappointed"; "still ending, and beginning still" (i. 143; iii. 128–9, 627).

The first lines of Book I, "The Sofa," contain an announcement of Cowper's literary career and "situation" to date, one that teasingly expands the "history of the following production" to include his earlier publications:

> I sing the SOFA. I who lately sang
> Truth, Hope and Charity, and touch'd with awe
> The solemn chords, and with a trembling hand,
> Escap'd with pain from that advent'rous flight,
> Now seek repose upon an humbler theme;
> The theme though humble, yet august and proud
> Th' occasion – for the Fair commands the song.
> (i. 1–7)

The conventionally humble pose of the writer setting out on his enterprise collapses into the undignified physical image of him resting on his subject, the sofa – an image juxtaposed with his previous endeavor to "touch" intangible abstractions. The author of the sententious moral trinity of "Truth," "Hope," and "Charity" (1782) – all three of which remain key words in *The Task* (see e.g. iii. 289, 841, 196–7) – now seeks a real as well as a metaphoric refuge. His "Poetical Epistle to Lady Austen" (written in 1781) had presented Cowper as one whose verse conveyed "truths divine, and clear, / Which couch'd in prose" his audience "will not hear" (ll. 21–2). He could not then, perhaps, have imagined himself triply "couch'd" – in verse form, in subject matter, and in person – by Lady Austen's demand, although he assured another friend that he did not "lownge over" *The Sofa*, as *The Task* was originally to have been called (Cowper 1981: 269). Addressing his subject in "Charity," he wrote that he had endeavored "to redeem / A poet's name, by making thee the theme" (ll. 13–14). Now, however, he is a sufferer pursuing comfort through descent from sublime to humble topics, from solitary singing to courteous, sociable deference. He wishes for safety in numbers – both in the poetic sense, and in the sense of escaping from himself through company. *The Task*'s characteristic "revolvency" (i. 372), its repeated circlings and hedgings about a topic, are already emerging: "sing . . . sang," "humbler theme . . . theme . . . humble." Such protective enclosure of a subject (and of the poet) is often communicated, as in the latter example, through the bracketing ABBA pattern of chiasmus. This can seal in two lines of blank verse as if seeking to approximate the finality of a rhyming couplet: "A *wish* for *ease* and *leisure*, and *'ere* long / Found *here* that *leisure* and that *ease* I *wish'd*" (iv. 800–1, emphases added).

Yet Cowper's medium, while it offers such "shelt'ring eaves" and "loop-holes of retreat" through which "To peep at [the] world" (v. 65; iv. 88–9), is also flexible enough to overrun bounded vistas and line endings into larger prospects and broader interdependencies of meaning and of feeling. His form encourages self-concealments

and emergences from cover, a sense of isolation and of kinship with mankind. The "boundless contiguity" endemic to blank verse (ii. 2) – what Cowper termed the "frequent infusion of one line into another" (Cowper 1981: 288), as opposed to the bounded heroic couplets of "Truth," "Hope," and "Charity" – is already being put to use in this opening to express mobility and stasis, freedom and limitation. The apparent trailing constituent "and with a trembling hand" might, in fact, be qualifying a retrospective or a present gesture. Its hesitant "infusion" into lines 2 and 4 thus suggests that it is treading water, deferring the moment of decisive action. Does the metonymic hand tremble as it touches the chords, or as it escapes "with pain" to a new sheet of paper and this poem, or both? Is the speaker's persona continuous or discontinuous with his former character? (Disembodied hands, like disembodied eyes and ears, are a leitmotif of *The Task*, isolating the senses of touch, sight, and sound from their possessors and from each other. See e.g. i. 157, 165–6, 229–30, 288–90, 333–4, 391, 405, 442, 456, 514; ii. 757; iii. 399–400, 413, 416–17, 428–9; iv. 92–3.) Line 6 similarly allows the reader, however briefly, to entertain the notion that Cowper's "theme" is at once "humble" and "proud" (akin to the "modest grandeur" of evening, iv. 257) – prefiguring further conflations of what are also represented as diametrically opposed qualities: country/town, solitude/company, strength/weakness, outdoors/indoors, God/man, nature/art, sincerity/pretense, labor/repose, among others. By allowing his subject (and, by extension, his authorial persona) the dual status of humility and pride, Cowper suspends a moral and literary paradox in front of the reader, only to retract it via enjambment.

This is hardly a promising start for a poem, since "repose" implies an ending rather than a beginning. For the moment, Cowper prolongs his current "situation" by rehearsing a mock-georgic progress-piece on the development of seats up to the point in time and space at which *The Task* opens, with the author plumping himself down to sit on and write about the summit of genteel domesticity. In the course of this section, recumbent "leisure" (including the poet's) is approached through the work necessary to produce it. The manufacturer's toil is comically replicated in the laboriousness of the speaker's mannered inventories – which also identify him, on the other hand, as the polite observer of a barbaric scene: "Time was, when cloathing sumptuous or for use, / Save their own painted skins, our sires had none . . . " (i. 8–9). As it turns out, this spectator wishes to set himself apart from, as well as to celebrate, both primitivism and civilization. Each new, ingenious improvement on the joint-stool provokes, as Cowper might put it, a more deep-seated unease. The chair is a triply "restless" imposition in its slippery incapacity to offer comfort, in the ceaseless human effort to perfect it, and in the ungainly comedy of the poet's style: "so hard," he writes, is it "T' attain perfection in this nether world," punning on the obduracy of ancient chairs with a cheeky nod to their occupants' "nether" regions (i. 44, 84–5). Finally, the sofa is "accomplished," as is the burden of Cowper's first task (i. 88). Yet the achievement is delusory. Longed-for ease, once attained, transforms itself into laziness, ill-health, and neglect of duty, in light of which the poet's consummately "sweet" and sofa-bound repose, as well as his playfulness, begin to seem culpable (i. 89–102). In fact,

the genealogy of seats has plotted a decline as well as a progression from the "rugged rock" or "grav'ly bank" of the seaside "chief" (i. 12–13), via the citizens' poky "chaise" (i. 80), to the luxurious sofa – from invincible maritime greatness to an attenuated national and individual hardiness that is associated with the city, as well as focused on the writer. For it is here that Cowper's opposition of town to country begins to surface. The growing sense of the poet's subject as a restriction, as well as a desire to turn away from manifestations of bankrupt luxury (including his own), impel him to celebrate rejuvenating activity in the great outdoors. The first-person voice, having disappeared for ninety-five lines, now returns:

> Oh may I live exempted (while I live
> Guiltless of pamper'd appetite obscene)
> From pangs arthritic that infest the toe
> Of libertine excess. The SOFA suits
> The gouty limb, 'tis true; but gouty limb
> Though on a SOFA, may I never feel:
> For I have loved the rural walk through lanes
> Of grassy swarth close cropt by nibbling sheep,
> And skirted thick with intertexture firm
> Of thorny boughs: have loved the rural walk
> O'er hills, through valleys, and by rivers' brink,
> E'er since a truant boy I passed my bounds
> T' enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames.
> And still remember, nor without regret
> Of hours that sorrow since has much endear'd,
> How oft, my slice of pocket store consumed,
> Still hung'ring pennyless and far from home,
> I fed on scarlet hips and stoney haws,
> Or blushing crabs, or berries that imboss
> The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere.
> Hard fare! but such as boyish appetite
> Disdains not, nor the palate undepraved
> By culinary arts, unsav'ry deems.
> No SOFA then awaited my return,
> Nor SOFA then I needed.
>
> (i. 103–27)

But this switch in focus does not constitute the major change we have been led to expect: the speaker remains as drawn to polite society as he is attracted by the recollection of primitive simplicity. Accents of nostalgia for a solitary communion with nature will soon be repudiated, in favor of company, when he encounters the deprivations of "the *peasant's nest*" and the sad isolation of Crazy Kate (i. 221–51, 534–56). This passage's strange combination of pre- and postlapsarian vantage points (its allusions to an "undepraved" state, the illicit consumption of fruit, and wandering "far from home"), alongside the Latinisms, inversions, modifications, and deferrals of the first

four lines, reveals the long-recognized influence on Cowper of *Paradise Lost* (1667) – perhaps especially of Book IV, in which Adam and Eve's guiltless existence is filtered through the guilty eyes of Satan. It has a more subdued tone than its original. Unlike Milton, Cowper employs no superlatives, and the verse gradually uncoils (once outside the drawing room) into calm, orderly syntax.

Yet the speaker's childhood represents a condition not of blissful rest after welcome labor, but of active deprivation and vagrancy. He breaks his "bounds" to consume fruit as "a truant boy." And he recalls hours of happy frugality (not of innocence), accompanied by the morally pejorative overtones of divergence from a strait road that are also associated with the practice of blank verse. Similarly, the opening to Book III, "The Garden," in which the poet styles himself "As one who long in thickets and in brakes / Entangled, winds now this way and now that / His devious course uncertain, seeking home" and pursues "Domestic happiness, thou only bliss / Of Paradise that has survived the fall!" (iii. 1–3, 41–2), has as its source the point, in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, at which Satan is about to enter the Garden of Eden:

> Satan had journeyed on, pensive and slow;
> But further way found none, so thick entwined,
> As one continued brake, the undergrowth
> Of shrubs and tangling bushes had perplexed
> All path of man or beast that passed that way
> (*Paradise Lost*, iv. 173–7)

The increasingly negative implications of straying down a primrose path instead of pursuing "a cleanlier road," "unimpair'd and pure" (iii. 17, 43), entail that the speaker's youthful ramblings will need to be reined in. A state of nature, like a state of social refinement, comes to seem the province at once of happiness and corruption – and this in spite of the fact that Cowper endeavors to draw a firm line between the two.

The landscape he next introduces meanders from a small, laboring human "scene" to a river that "Conducts the eye along his sinuous course" until it reaches "our fav'rite elms," concealing "the herdsman's solitary hut" (i. 158–68). This panorama facilitates a progressive slackening of pace and adjustment of scale. The speaker widens his field of vision from "The task of new discov'ries" to a positive appraisal of the earth's "ceaseless action" (i. 218, 367), then from England to the realms encountered through commerce (i. 592–677). Here, Cowper's nascent triumphalism slackens, as he realizes that "Doing good, / Disinterested good, is not our trade" (i. 673–4). An empire that locates its heart in "gain-devoted cities" (i. 682) rather than in the divinely ordained countryside is on the brink of destruction.

Book II, "The Time-Piece," continues to revolve the awareness of sin and suffering developed in Book I, presenting a disjointed catalogue of viciousness that singles out war, slavery, natural disasters, unjust imprisonment, divine wrath, trifling clergy, and wayward undergraduates: "There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart, / It does

not feel for man" (ii. 8–9). Crazy Kate has grown in stature and influence to become a punitively "crazy earth" with her "shaking fits" (ii. 60). For Cowper, the peaks of social and literary refinement (represented at the opening of Book I by the sofa and the author's leisure, at its close by urban folly and artifice) often turn into the limits of tolerability and prompt a reflex reaction of disgust. Description – the art of graphic or ekphrastic writing (ii. 290–6; iv. 239–42), of tracing by physical motion (i. 109–58), and of marking a boundary (the "Argument" of Book VI involves "*A line drawn between the lawful and the unlawful destruction*" of animals [Cowper 1995: 235]) – requires the provision of natural and artificial limits: tracks (i. 161), rivers (i. 163), courses (i. 165), streams (i. 169), paths (i. 471), hedges (i. 514), punctuation, paragraphing, lines, and line endings, for example. As *The Task* proceeds, it also entails their dissolution: "The streams are lost amid the splendid bank / O'erwhelming all distinction" (v. 96–7). Cowper's blank verse gradually reveals itself as an art of brinkmanship. It rehearses the limits of social progress and of his own writing in ways that alternately support and reject formal, thematic, public, and private restriction: "For he that values liberty, confines / His zeal for her predominance within / No narrow bounds" (v. 393–5). Here, characteristically, Cowper's placement of "confines" and "within" at unpunctuated line endings gives the sense of formal constraint itself a limited power (we need twice to overrun the unit of verse to complete the unit of sense), while "*No* narrow bounds" finally declines to observe the parameters of feeling that the syntax has led us to expect. These lines provide a broad justification for the entire poem's fluidity of structure, while also setting up anticipations of a happier containment that will come to fruition in the domestic refuges of Books III and IV.

In Book II, Cowper weighs up the possibilities of human division and unity through similar effects. Returning to his hopeless wish for solitude – a "boundless contiguity of shade" that eschews his necessarily social "bounds" – the speaker despairs of "The nat'ral bond / Of brotherhood," destroyed by "Lands intersected" and the artificial "bonds" of oppression (ii. 2, 9–10, 16, 36). In the ancient seats of learning, where once "The limits of controul" restrained errant passions, "A dissolution of all bonds ensued" (ii. 719, 743). The ideal of this book – like that of Book V, "The Winter Morning Walk" (331–4) – turns out to be a self-control to which the individual voluntarily adheres, such as that imposed by the practice of writing blank verse: "no restraints can circumscribe them more, / Than they themselves by choice, for wisdom's sake" (ii. 792–3). Here, in a diametric reversal of the surprising failure to adhere to "confines" in v. 393–5, the first line seems to mark a liberation from every rule – "more" having the possible sense of "any more." Yet crossing the poetic line (thereby exercising a freedom) reveals that this liberty has been subordinated to the self-imposed dictates of wisdom (thereby declining a freedom). By testing the borders of his own verse, Cowper deftly fields the claims of both restrained and boundless speaking (in Book III, this will lead a "self-sequester'd man" to "confine / Remarks that gall," iii. 386, 36–7). Indeed, moments of relief from the apocalyptic non sequiturs of the "mutilated structure" (i. 774) that is Book II arrive only when Cowper is reflecting on his literary task as fulfilling a private need rather than the public good:

> occupations of the poet's mind
> So pleasing, . . . steal away the thought
> With such address, from themes of sad import,
> That lost in his own musings, happy man!
> He feels th' anxieties of life, denied
> Their wonted entertainment, all retire.
> Such joys has he that sings.
>
> (ii. 298–304)

This fragment presents the small-scale apposition of changes of mood and perspective, rather than lurching alternations from one scene of life to another. Four different, progressively enlarged assertions are contained within ll. 302–3: "He feels th' anxieties of life," "He feels th' anxieties of life, denied," "He feels th' anxieties of life, denied / Their wonted entertainment," and "He feels th' anxieties of life, denied / Their wonted entertainment, all retire," might each stand alone. Together, and via the imposed boundaries of punctuation and line ending that are successively "overleap'd" (ii. 718), they trace an arc from the "wonted" and unwanted shackles of anxiety to their temporary removal. Syntactic accretion ensures that as sense units are modified, threats to their stability recede. Yet Cowper's procedure is characteristically ambivalent, caught between denial and affirmation: in the midst of singing, he is simultaneously alive to the very troubles from which singing ought to distance him.

This localized poetic model provides a cue for Books III and IV, in which the speaker determines to move away from excoriating public abuses to a portrait of "Domestic happiness" (iii. 41). Here, sofa-bound repose once more takes its place (iii. 31–2). Having cast himself as a deviant Satan who, "seeking home," became distracted in the course of Book II (iii. 3), Cowper's act of "*Self-recollection and reproof*" ("Argument" of Book III [Cowper 1995: 161]) returns the speaker, via allusive literary archaisms that recall the "grassy swarth" of i. 110, to his first character in the "Advertisement" – that of the chivalric knight: "If chance at length he find a green-swerd smooth / And faithful to the foot, his spirits rise, / He chirrups brisk his ear-erecting steed" (iii. 7–10). Mingled with this Arthurian homecoming to Lady Austen's original demand (iii. 11–14) is a sense of Christian journeying through the "mire" and "Slough of Despond": "having long in miry ways been foiled / And sore discomfited, from slough to slough / Plunging, and half despairing" (iii. 4–6). Three strains of literary allegiance – Miltonic, courtly, and Bunyanesque – thus serve to locate this speaker as a reader, with a firmer sense of where he belongs geographically, artistically, and emotionally.

The tone of this opening sets Book II's sermonizing onslaughts in the distant past: "Disgust conceal'd / Is oft-times proof of wisdom" (iii. 38–9). "The Garden" seems temporally as well as spatially removed from the town. Yet within a hundred lines, Cowper is already experiencing the renewed temptations of "angry verse," directed at urban profligacy, thereby overrunning his limits in the act of upbraiding the same fault in others: "Virtue and vice had bound'ries in old time / Not to be passed" (iii. 64, 75–6). Returning the attention to "Domestic life in rural leisure pass'd" (iii. 292),

the "sweet colloquial pleasures" of Books III and IV (iv. 398) arise from the happy coexistence of vernacular diction – "plump," "warm," "snug," "spiry," "ruddier," "Peep," "streaky," "homely," "sooty," "rough," "fleecy," "downy," "thorny," "thistly," "reeking," "sore," "clogg'd," "sluggish," "jutting," "rude," "sottish," "whiff," and "guzzling," for instance (iii. 511, 568, 570, 573, 574; iv. 245, 252, 292, 309, 326, 333, 335, 342, 343, 345, 350, 370, 431, 469, 473) – with a latinate register and literary allegiance that are especially conspicuous in the celebrated passage on cucumbers:

> To raise the prickly and green-coated gourd
> So grateful to the palate, and when rare
> So coveted, else base and disesteem'd –
> Food for the vulgar merely – is an art
> That toiling ages have but just matured,
> And at this moment unassay'd in song.
> Ye gnats have had, and frogs and mice long since
> Their eulogy; those sang the Mantuan bard,
> And these the Grecian in ennobling strains,
> And in thy numbers, Phillips, shines for ay
> The solitary shilling. Pardon then
> Ye sage dispensers of poetic fame!
> Th' ambition of one meaner far, whose pow'rs
> Presuming an attempt not less sublime,
> Pant for the praise of dressing to the taste
> Of critic appetite, no sordid fare,
> A cucumber, while costly yet and scarce.
>
> (iii. 446–62)

The object of the writer's painstaking cultivation – and, by implication, his verse itself – seems to lack inherent value. From this point onwards in *The Task* a reader senses that the external activities described by the speaker are blending into reflections on the formal experiment of "rais[ing]" and "dressing" them up as poetry. Thus, for instance, when Book V mentions "The feather'd tribes domestic" as "Conscious, and fearful of too deep a plunge" (v. 62, 64), it seems "Conscious" in the same moment of *The Task*'s periphrastic elevation of a mere group of hens to "The feather'd tribes domestic." The poet, himself "fearful of too deep a plunge" by calling a hen a hen, must tread as carefully in writing about homely subjects as those subjects themselves on the slippery ground – "Half on wing / And half on foot" (v. 62–3), combining ascent with descent – and content merges with form. There is a feeling at such points of his self-identification with lowly topics and characters, but also of his distance from them. Samuel Johnson's famous dismissal of the "green-coated gourd," like this passage from Book III, implies a care in ornamentation that overlays unworthiness: "a cucumber should be well sliced, and dressed with pepper and vinegar, and then thrown out, as good for nothing" (Johnson and Boswell 1984: 335). Subject to the

whims of the market, Cowper's recalcitrant, "prickly" topic merges into the vehicle and author that celebrate it, both of them as weak and perishable as a hothouse plant, or the ice palace of Book V: "'Twas transient in its nature, as in show / 'Twas durable. As worthless as it seemed / Intrinsically precious" (v. 173–5).

Yet the speaker remains confident enough to be sarcastic at the expense of the critics; his overstated, panting desire to administer instruction in the form of a gilded pill (a cucumber disguised for fastidious palates) suggests that readers will be unwittingly improved by eating their greens. Recalling the jovial "*Bill of Fare*" with which Henry Fielding introduced *Tom Jones* (1749) (Fielding 1986: 51–3), Cowper's art of "dressing to the taste . . . no sordid fare" stakes a claim to both ripeness and unripeness. His topic is original – although the art of growing cucumbers is "just matured," it is "unassay'd in song" – yet also buttressed by its place within a recognizable literary genealogy, as a mock-heroic descendant of the pseudo-Virgilian *Culex* or "The Gnat," the pseudo-Homeric *Batrachomyomachia* or "Battle of the Frogs and Mice," and John Philips's Miltonic burlesque, *The Splendid Shilling* (first published, in pirated form, in 1701). The serious element of Book III's new idea of a poet's task – intimate, careful tending of matters close to home – is manifested in concrete activities that center on the garden (iii. 386–543). With the selection of "a favor'd spot" and enclosure of "Th' agglomerated pile," the real "task" of establishing a crop now "begins" (iii. 469–72). As a precursor to planting the seed (iii. 511–20), such vulnerable, laborious construction resembles the tottering structure of the poem thus far. Cowper seems again to be redefining his boundaries as he combines his subject with its poetic medium – suggesting that the first two books have a prefatory or foundational status (akin to the "Advertisement") in relation to the present one.

The opening of Book IV, "The Winter Evening," charts the arrival of the outside world – in the form of the postman – at Cowper's rural door. It continues to celebrate the distance of the metropolis from the speaker and defines him as another kind of reader: one fond of newspapers (reassuringly contained forms of urban life) as well as of books (iv. 5–35, 50–119). In a milder, cosier, but equally stagey version of Alexander Pope's *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735) – "Shut, shut the door, good *John!* fatigu'd I said, / Tye up the knocker, say I'm sick, I'm dead . . . What Walls can guard me, or what Shades can hide?" (ll. 1–2, 7), Cowper delights in surveying town gossip within the confines of his domestic fortress:

> Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
> Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
> And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
> Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
> That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
> So let us welcome peaceful evening in.
> (iv. 36–41)

Like the permeable boundary of a line ending, closed shutters allow the evening to enter. As in Book II's lines on the joys of writing poetry, the speaker, in removing

himself from the public, stays alert to the fact that such refuges are transient. This is the sole occasion on which "the sofa" appears in uncapitalized form – as a wholly incarnated object rather than as a semi-figurative presence – from which the speaker "Grieves" at, but is not alarmed by, external events (iv. 102). He then steps out from his position of security into a panorama of thrifty, sly, and ultimately threatening country life (iv. 333–690). The Arcadian image of a happy, laboring poor that prevailed in Book I yields to a more complex and realistic depiction, which sends the poet scurrying back to the domestic "niche he was ordain'd to fill" (iv. 792).

Book V begins with the apparent flourish of a Miltonic address to the sun:

> 'Tis morning; and the sun with ruddy orb
> Ascending fires the horizon. While the clouds
> That crowd away before the driving wind,
> More ardent as the disk emerges more,
> Resemble most some city in a blaze,
> Seen through the leafless wood.
>
> (v. 1–6)

Yet the image of clouds is compromised by a series of qualifications: the line beginning "More ardent" ends on another incipient "more"; then it only "most" resembles the disturbing vision of a blazing city, filtered through the imperfect shelter of a "leafless wood" ("leafless" because it has also been burned, or because it is winter? This book sees the most violent of *The Task*'s changes in temperature). The internally rhyming "clouds / That crowd" are moving, not forward in synchronized combination, but away, dispersed by the wind; effect precedes cause. Placing the two prepositions "away before" alongside one another counteracts the feeling of progression still further; the temporal as well as spatial implication of "before" gives the image a sense of retroactive awkwardness, so that the clouds appear to be simultaneously ahead of, and behind, the wind. The viewer's presence, central to the previous book, is here absorbed by the passive "Seen." For most of Book V, the speaker will continue to be a submerged onlooker, his verse combining motion and immobility. Water takes over from the ramble as the governing dynamic metaphor, culminating in the portrait of the Russian empress's ice palace. Here, Cowper returns to the effects of artifice on nature, and vice versa:

> In such a palace poetry might place
> The armoury of winter, where his troops
> The gloomy clouds find weapons, arro'wy sleet
> Skin-piercing volley, blossom-bruising hail,
> And snow that often blinds the trav'ller's course,
> And wraps him in an unexpected tomb.
> Silently as a dream the fabric rose.
> No sound of hammer or of saw was there.
> Ice upon ice, the well-adjusted parts
> Were soon conjoined, nor other cement ask'd

Than water interfused to make them one.
Lamps gracefully disposed and of all hues
Illumined ev'ry side. A wat'ry light
Gleamed through the clear transparency, that seemed
Another moon new-risen, or meteor fall'n
From heav'n to earth, of lambent flame serene.
So stood the brittle prodigy, though smooth
And slipp'ry the materials, yet frost-bound
Firm as a rock . . .
The same lubricity was found in all,
And all was moist to the warm touch, a scene
Of evanescent glory, once a stream,
And soon to slide into a stream again.
(v. 138–68)

In keeping with a location in which warmth is the "enemy" (v. 159), Cowper restricts his own interventions to a cool minimum. It is a personified "poetry," rather than the speaker, who finds within such a construction "The armoury of winter," which begins to sound as if it is an instrument of martial oppression rather than of sympathy. Yet nature first appears to be conniving in a man-made fabric: mere water binds the "well-adjusted" building blocks. Discrete end-stopped lines (ll. 143–5) yield to "interfused" and overrunning blank verse units, mimetically cooperating with the trickling effect from brick to brick. (Since Cowper described his blank verse as working by "frequent infusion," it seems as if the ice palace is an especially happy combination of form with content.) The Miltonic, doubly qualified comparison of the frozen structure to a meteor's "lambent flame serene" heralds its demise. But it is the "warm touch" of a human being that propels the final dissolution "Of evanescent glory," a presage of the empress's transient power as well as a recollection of Cowper's own attempt, in earlier poems, to "touch" the "solemn chords" of "Truth, Hope and Charity." This passage seems, like Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (written in 1798), to encourage the idea that artistic creation may resist the flux and decay of the natural world, and at the same time to prove that it cannot. Like his attitude to the cucumber, Cowper's presentation of the ice palace is "Threat'ning at once and nourishing the plant" of art, including his own (vi. 36). When directly apprehended by the senses, the grandeur of a monumentally ambitious work disperses (like the "clouds" of the opening lines, which are included in the catalogue of verse's winter "armoury") into the frail constituents it was designed to survive.

Rebuked by such a threat, the meditative natural descriptions of *The Task*'s sixth and final book, "The Winter Walk at Noon," restrict the poet's "comprehensive views" to those of his own experience: the comparatively narrow "windings of my way through many years" (vi. 15, 18). The speaker's endeavor to date is summarized in a newly comprehended narrative trajectory: "The night was winter in his roughest mood, / The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon . . . The season smiles

resigning all its rage" (vi. 57–61). He reassures us that "The walk" of Book I is "still verdant" as a topic (vi. 70), but he now focuses his wandering persona's full attention on the poem itself:

> It shall not grieve me, then, that once, when call'd
> To dress a Sofa with the flow'rs of verse,
> I play'd awhile, obedient to the fair
> With that light task, but soon to please her more
> Whom flow'rs alone I knew would little please,
> Let fell th' unfinish'd wreath, and rov'd for fruit.
> Rov'd far and gather'd much. Some harsh, 'tis true,
> Pick'd from the thorns and briars of reproof,
> But wholesome, well-digested. Grateful some
> To palates that can taste immortal truth,
> Insipid else, and sure to be despis'd.
> But all is in his hand whose praise I seek . . .
> Whose frown can disappoint the proudest strain,
> Whose approbation – prosper even mine.
> (vi. 1006–24)

This takes us back to the mock-chivalric beginnings of the "Advertisement," to the rambling after wholesome, hardy nourishment in Book I, and to the disdainful critical palates of the cucumber passage in Book III. The appropriate half-rhyme of "strain" with "mine" (appropriate because it formally strains against a tidy reconciliation of God with man), the rapidly swallowed "prosper even mine," fail quite to reach the finality of a couplet. As a likeness of the speaker's mind and life, the poem is "ended but not finish'd" (Cowper 1981: 269). The conclusion does succeed, however, in relocating the author and his work within a potentially receptive and redemptive environment. The phrase "fruit . . . Grateful some / To palates that can taste immortal truth" expresses the hope to please readers ambiguously poised between the fussy caprice of Lady Austen and the impenetrable, final determination of God – according to whom *The Task* will seem either a mere "trifle" or a "serious affair." Equally, Cowper's "grateful" conveys thankfulness for that original "taste" of "truth" he experienced in the process of writing the poem. The double meaning of "grateful" lies at the heart of recovering the domestic Arcadia that is, for Cowper, sole remnant of a paradise lost: "Sometimes ['grateful'] has the sense of 'thankful,' sometimes of 'pleasing' . . . Perhaps Milton's fondness for the word is a reflection of the fact that in a pre-lapsarian state there would be no distinction of this kind. Adam and Eve were thankful for what pleased them, and being thankful is itself a pleasure" (Ricks 1978: 113).

See also chs. 2, "POETRY, POLITICS, AND EMPIRE"; 14, "JAMES THOMSON, *THE SEASONS*"; 25, "RHYMING COUPLETS AND BLANK VERSE"; 29, "THE GEORGIC."

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24
Robert Burns, "Tam o' Shanter"

Murray Pittock

"Tam o' Shanter" is an unusual poem in that it lies at the core of both academic assessment and popular celebration of Robert Burns. The recitation of this complex and tricky narrative poem, which makes frequent satiric sallies by way of the many sub-genres it invokes or inflects, lies at the core of the cultural practices of Burns Suppers around the world. In this, it has to some extent been adopted by the tradition it satirizes, that of the reduction of orality's elusive and hidden nature to the dimensions of cultural codification and collection.

The poem tells the story of a relatively well-to-do Scottish peasant farmer, Tam, who habitually gets drunk whenever he visits Ayr on market day. One evening, his prolonged stay in the pub not only gets him drunk but arouses lecherous passions, which are alluded to in a line on Tam's intimacy with the innkeeper's wife. Eventually, either he cannot risk any further absence from his own wife or it is closing time, and Tam has to ride home in a storm. Passing the ruined kirk of Alloway, he is attracted by lights and the noise of revelry, such as he has just left. Drawing closer, he sees that witches are dancing to music provided by the Devil. One witch, who has only a short shirt on, attracts his attention: it is hinted that Tam can glimpse her buttocks. Aroused and excited by her dancing, Tam forgets that betrayal of a stranger's presence on such occasions is followed by dire consequences, and shouts out "Weel done, Cutty-sark!" (l. 189), thus breaching folk taboo in the sheer physicality of his appreciation of the metaphysical, his ready and instinctive nature bursting in on the supernatural. The taboo, however, prevails over Tam's voyeuristic cheer: the lights go out, and the hellish crew in rage pursues him. The fact that Cutty Sark is the foremost among them uneasily unites the folk-tale elements of the story with male sexual fantasy. The witches eventually almost catch him, but he escapes at the Brig o Doon, as the servants of the Devil cannot cross running water. Just as one taboo endangers Tam, so another saves him. However, Cutty Sark is close enough to grab hold of the "tail" – not of Tam, but of Meg, his mare. The narrator concludes the poem by a brief moral:

> Whene'er to drink you are inclin'd,
> Or cutty-sarks run in your mind,
> Think, ye may buy the joys o'er dear,
> Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.
> (ll. 221–4)

There is clearly something wrong with this moral closure, as Tam has not suffered from buying "joys o'er dear": rather, it is his horse that has suffered ("left poor Maggie scarce a stump," l. 218), and that suffering has nothing to do with transgression.

The status of the narrator and his relation to what he narrates is thus one of the key questions of the poem, because it is the narrator's relationship to Tam that underpins the implications of a story which is a mixture of folk and comic tale. For much of the critical history of the poem, its uneven tone has been a puzzle to commentators: more recently, beginning with Tom Crawford's majestic *Burns* (1994; 1st edn. 1960), there has been an increasing understanding of the dialogic quality of the poem's narrative, and its significance.

"Tam o' Shanter" was written for Captain Francis Grose (1731–91), an antiquary who was, like may of his contemporaries, collecting British traditions across the four nations. He had already published the *Antiquities of England and Wales* (1773–87) and was preparing an *Antiquities of Scotland* (1789–91) before commencing work on an Irish book (Crawford 1992: 108); he died before he could finish this last collection. Burns was friendly toward Grose, but some of his comments, particularly the most famous ("A chield's amang you, taking notes / And, faith, he'll prent it," Burns 1992: 392), suggest a degree of reservation about the activities of this "profound Antiquarian." Although he found Grose kind and funny, Burns also characterized him as "Dr Slop," and generally spoke about him with an air of humor or ironic distancing. In June 1790 he sent Grose the original of the story of "Tam o' Shanter" in a letter: this tale is much less sexualized (the witches remain "hags") but it shares the poem's ending, and Burns's slyly solemn moral: "the unsightly, tailless condition of the vigorous steed was to the last hour of the noble creature's life, an awful warning to the Carrick farmers, not to stay too late in Ayr markets." The letter also gives Burns's own warning about the stories he is recounting, for at the end of the third tale ("Tam" is the second), the poet notes that the story requires to be interpreted by "Somebody that understood Scotch" (Burns 1985: vol. 1, 423; vol. 2, 29, 31, 47, 52).

Generally, the stronger Burns's Scots is, the more directly he is addressing a community with which he identifies, and the less ambivalent is his narrative stance. A story that can be understood only by someone who understands Scots is a story by its nature inaccessible to the non-Scots collector. Is "Tam o' Shanter" also in part an example of this? When Burns sent Grose the poem of "Tam o' Shanter" on December 1, 1790, he portrayed himself as the "rustic bard," a suitable subject for the antiquary's collection (Burns 1985: vol. 2, 62, 72), and a self-image which reveals Burns at his most slippery, as the Preface and text of the 1786 Kilmarnock edition of his poems makes clear (Pittock 2003). Grose duly collected "Tam o' Shanter" for the second

volume of his *Antiquities of Scotland*, where the poem appeared in 1791. But what did it mean? Was it, too, a story to be interpreted by "Somebody who understood Scotch"? Burns's own bardic stance was elusive and deceptive, and he carries this over into the tension between the voice of the narrator in "Tam o' Shanter," with its insistence on moral closure, and the uproariously open oral tale which resists it, all of which is told, by the narrator, for Grose.

Telling tall tales to antiquaries was not unknown. One interesting example is perhaps that of Patrick Graham, minister of Aberfoyle, who in 1806 produced *Sketches Descriptive of Picturesque Scenery*, a book which included much local anecdote about the supernatural, but nothing about what is now the most famous supernatural occurrence to have taken place at Aberfoyle: the disappearance of an earlier minister, Robert Kirk, at the hands of the fairies in 1692. However, when Graham published his expanded *Sketches of Perthshire* in 1812, Kirk made an appearance, together with a stanza from Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* introduced to comment on his fate. Graham's supply of Trossachs folklore for Scott had intervened and, one way or another, had produced the Trossachs' most exciting fairy story (Cowan and Henderson 2002).

Burns similarly supplies Grose with a supernatural tale, on this occasion a tale of witches. For his hero, he chooses a member of his own community – and indeed his own class – a surrogate for Burns himself. Tam belongs to a wealthier peasant class which was vanishing under the pressures of rising rents (even for unproductive farms) and the growing efficiency of larger farming enterprises. Over time, many in Tam's class descended into poverty and the agricultural working class. Burns's own family came from this background and shared this fate.

And the narrator? He is male, as his participation in Tam's excitement over the dancing witches shows; and he stands both without and within the world he describes, his voice sometimes that of the antiquary, in love with the sententious, fey, and picturesque, and sometimes that of the Scottish peasantry whose story he reports. The moral coda to the tale depends on the loss of the "tail" with an "I," and these two tales/tails can be taken as symbolizing the external antiquarian stance of the collector, who imposes the moral of the "tale," and the interior, secret self of the "tail" with an "I," whose love for a bawdy story is in fact the hidden warning coda to the antiquarians' practice of depoliticizing and bowdlerizing the peasant world.

Tam's story begins with the departure of the "chapman billies," purveyors of the printed ballads already being collected by the antiquaries to whose representative the poem is dedicated. As they leave, they make room for the narrator, who first of all represents himself as one of the community ("getting fou and unco happy," l. 6), and then shifts from Scots to standard English in the course of the first verse paragraph, as he anticipates the scolding wives will give their errant husbands on their return: "Gathering her brows like gathering storm / Nursing her wrath to keep it warm" (ll. 11–12). Standard English is the language of distance, judgment, and reportage; Scots the intimate tongue of participation, expressing the communal "we." The narrator uses both, but does not consider the Scots inferior: tellingly perhaps, the quotation that heads the poem is from Gavin Douglas, canonical writer in Scots and the author of the

first translation of the *Aeneid* into the vernacular in the British Isles. This Bishop of Dunkeld, a scion of the greatest family of medieval Scotland, cannot have rank pulled on him by an English antiquary in the manner that an Ayrshire peasant can. "Tam o' Shanter" is the peasant subject, but also perhaps on one level the peasant author, as Kenneth White has suggested: for his name, with its undertones of "chanter," "chantre," or "shanty" may imply a hidden identity with Burns (White 1990: 5).

The shift between English and Scottish voices in the narrative provides very tempting material for a Bakhtinian analysis. English and Anglophone antiquarianism demanded a record of heteroglossic traditions in a unitary voice. As indicated both by his stress on the need for someone to "interpret" Scots in his letter to Grose, and his extensive use of a Scots voice in the poem, Burns is resisting this demand with what is surely an exercise in hybridity, "an encounter . . . between two linguistic utterances" (Craig 1999: 89) as the languages of Scots and English jostle each other for ascendancy through the poem. The narrator by turns appears to conspire with his subject as an equal and to satirize him as a fool, turning from the laughter of belonging to being "above the object of his mockery" in Bakhtinian terms – although, as indicated above, the opening quotation undermines standard English's right to pull rank. Meanwhile, the setting of the poem fulfills Bakhtin's category of the ritual spectacle. The market day is a time of carnival and riot ("Ae market-day thou was nae sober," l. 22), which is based on drink ("They had been fou for weeks thegither," l. 44), oral tales and laughter ("The night drave on wi sangs and clatter . . . The Souter tauld his queerest stories," ll. 45, 49). The light Scots of these lines indicates the narrator's identification with such community celebrations, and his local knowledge of the reason for them: ("Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses, / For honest men and bonny lasses," ll. 15–16), a remark set in parenthesis from the narrator to his audience, who by token of this aside are identified as not a local but a national audience, the audience to whom such an excuse must be made because it is waiting to hear an antiquarian tale, not an account of a communal spree. On line 33, some part of his audience is identified: "gentle dames" with "sage advices." Sage advice will be offered by this poem as well as by its audience: but another spirit keeps breaking through. In the same way, the mainly tetrameter couplets hint at neoclassical closure, but also at the ballads: moreover, the rhyme requires Scots pronunciation to retain its regularity, while some of the rhymes, such as "understand/hand" (ll. 77–8) are regular in either Scots or English pronunciation. The poem is perfectly balanced, permanently in the act of sitting in remote judgment on itself and resisting that judgment in its localities. Linguistically, it represents an extremely sophisticated mediation between registers and between Scots and English.

The first part of the tale of Tam deals with his enjoyment of the pub (and the landlord's wife) on market night. This passage, from line 36 to line 57, is told in the conspiratorial light Scots of the narrator as participant, though the last four lines begin a shift to standard English ("Kings may be blest, but *Tam* was glorious, / O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!," ll. 57–8), which anticipates the standard English of the first coda, which closes the first third of the poem:

> But pleasures are like poppies spread,
> You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
> Or like the snow falls in the river,
> A moment white – then melts for ever . . .
> Or like the rainbow's lovely form
> Evanishing amid the storm.
> (ll. 59–62, 65–6)

This meditation on the transitoriness of human enjoyment ends Tam's visit to the pub, from which he now "maun ride" (l. 68). The narrator's high style of English passes "judgement on Tam's drunken abandon" (Bittenbender 1994: 33), as it evicts its subject from the secret world of oral and introspective pleasure to the governing realm of normality and rule, farms and marriages – and British antiquaries. But Tam's romantic journey never reaches this neoclassical goal within the confines of the poem's couplets. Instead, the narrator's socio-linguistic divorce from the scene of Tam's pleasures leads us into the fantastic world of the second part of the poem, where folk carnival is no longer found in the lineaments of local Ayrshire pleasures reported to a wider public, but instead in the threateningly anti-hierarchical and overtly orgiastic cavortings of the witches. Here we encounter the dark underside of peasant celebration, the occult (in both senses) world of local culture, where the witches dance "hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels" (l. 117), the native dances of Scotland, for their antiquarian audience, to whom they are revealed not as an old story but as a living threat.

Tam's journey to the witches initially appears to be controlled by the narrator within the familiar lineaments of the picturesque. The narrator knows local anecdotes and reports them in print (ll. 89–96), much as Scott was to do in the next generation; unlike Scott, perhaps, he realizes the death of orality these written renderings represent, for the first anecdote is that of the smothered chapman ("By this time he was cross the ford, / Whare, in the snaw, the chapman smoor'd" [ll. 89–90], the very Scots word for the manner of his death itself serving as an elegiac note on the death of Scots). At the beginning of the poem these ballad-sellers depart to leave the narrator in command; now in the middle of the poem the chapman's death is celebrated as an anecdote for antiquarian consumption. At the same time, the narrator bears witness to the reader of his knowingness as a collector as well as a local, for on Tam's journey to Alloway Kirk, the darkness, gloom, and decay of the scene (Alloway Kirk had been falling into ruin since 1690) develop to the point where the reader is plunged into a world of genre construction – the collector's art, not the peasant's experience: "That night, a child might understand, / The Deil had business on his hand" (ll. 77–8). Indeed, the function of the picturesque as "a frame of mind, an aesthetic attitude involving man in a direct and active relationship with the natural scenery through which he travels" (Barbier 1963: 99), enables the reader to take a parallel journey to Tam's, one rationally conducted and yet spiced with that *frisson* of controlled fear which characterizes the transitions from light to dark in the picturesque landscape,

when "The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd" (l. 75). As Tam draws near "*Kirk-Alloway*" (l. 102), this rather stagy scene design reaches its self-consciously gothic climax, once again delivered in the best narratorial English of the collector's external gaze:

> Before him *Doon* pours all his floods;
> The doubling storm roars thro' the woods;
> The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
> Near and more near the thunders roll . . .
> (ll. 97–100)

Yet as soon as the "bleeze" of "*Kirk-Alloway*" is sighted, a real Scottish place in the picturesque landscape, the narrator's language slips back into the colloquial Scots of shared community:

> Wi' usquabae, we'll face the devil! –
> The swats sae ream'd in *Tammie*'s noddle,
> Fair play, he car'd na deils a boddle.
> (ll. 108–10)

Not only the narrator's Scots, but his use of the diminutive "*Tammie*" indicates an affectionate intimacy with his hero; while "boddle," an old copper coin worth two Scots pence (two-thirds of a sterling farthing), obsolescent since 1707, serves as a term of cultural and linguistic exclusion for the English reader.

Inspired by Scotland's national drink, Tam and his mare Maggie venture forwards, and see the "unco sight" (l. 114) of warlocks and witches dancing. They dance the dances of Scotland rather than any "cotillion brent new frae *France*" (l. 116). The devil, in the shape of "A towzie tyke" (l. 121), plays "the pipes and gart them skirl" (l. 123). What is unmistakable here is the element of the native: Scottish music and dancing suppressed by neither domestic or Presbyterian disapproval (wickedly, indeed, taking place in a Presbyterian kirk), existing in its place of action oppositional to and independent of both. Just as the "Deil" exists as a character elsewhere in Burns who can send oppressive aristocrats to hell or steal away intrusive excisemen, so here he is a force of native and folkloric identity, akin in his music-making (as in "Address to the Deil" [Burns 1992: 135]) to the (Scots) Bard himself. A whole hinterland of commentary, indeed, could be made which relates Burns to Blake in their use of the Devil to redefine morality. In "Tam o' Shanter," what looks like extraneous gothic detailing ("Five tomahawks, wi' blude red-rusted; / Five scymitars, wi' murder crusted" [ll. 135–6]) is provided in a light Scots which possibly gestures toward presentation of the scene for external consumption, and in doing so moves us briefly away from the local and intimate implications of the bardic demon.

However, we swiftly move in to a much more intimate connection with this appalling scene, one not of fear or outrage, but rather of sexual excitement, a feeling in which the narrator (returning to Scots) frankly shares with Tam: "Thir breeks o' mine, my

only pair . . . I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies, / For ae blink o' the bonie burdies!" (ll. 155, 157–8). Although these lines technically refer to girls other than the witches, when Tam spots the prettiest of all, Cutty Sark, the narrator admits, "But here my Muse her wing maun cour" (l. 179): the narrative cannot preserve its distance in the excitement of the "lap and flang" of the "souple jade" (ll. 181–2). Like the narrator, Tam is excited, and so is the Devil, who flushes and twitches with sexual arousal and discomfort: "Even Satan glowr'd, and fidg'd fu' fain" (l. 185).

Narrative distance has gone: three greedy male gazes voyeuristically consume the "hurdies" (the sight of the buttocks may be implied by the "hurdies/burdies" rhyme as well as "Cutty-sark") of the dancing witch: Tam "thought his very een enrich'd" (l. 184). The narrator has disclaimed responsibility for the description as being "far beyond" his Muse's "pow'r," so Tam supplies the deficiency: "And roars out, 'Weel done, Cutty-sark!' " (l. 189). These are his only words in the whole poem, and they disrupt the narrative, with all its controlled and controlling use of register. By publicly bawling out his direct appreciation of the erotic dance he is witnessing, Tam voices to the world the power of the sexualized witch carnival directly and powerfully, with far greater authority than could ever be located in the mediated reportage of the antiquary. For one moment, he wrests the narrative from its narrator, returning it to oral immediacy: he is Tam the Chanter (the pipe part of the bagpipes), calling out his appreciation to the dance played before the piping (and likewise excited) Deil. Just as the unfettered imagination of Blake's Milton and Shelley's poetic conceptions are more powerful than what appears in print, so the residue of writing's record of orality is inflamed, if only for a moment, by the intervention of Tam's delighted and abandoned words in the immediacy of their contact with the peasantry's hidden culture. His subsequent flight and escape demonstrate that, far from getting his "fairin" (l. 201), Tam gets off scot free. The narrator's excited Scots suggests a sympathetic account, which modulates toward standard English only as the poem closes with its ludicrously inaccurate moral, for Tam's encounters with sex, alcoholism, and diabolism have left him completely unscathed. In the prose tale Burns sent to Grose, "Maggy," not "Cutty Sark", was the witch; in the poem, Maggy is the horse that Tam rides, and the witch succeeds only in damaging her alter ego: "The carlin claught her by the rump, / And left poor Maggie scarce a stump" (ll. 217–18). A faint implication of jealousy arises from this exchange of names. Tam drinks, he is unfaithful, women fight over him: by so much "Weel done, Cutty-sark!" outdistances as a truth claim the laborious distancing and moralizing of the standard English voice, to which the antiquarian aspires.

In "Tam o' Shanter," then, a poem that begins as a written report of an oral tale develops through a sequence of events that increasingly flummox its narrator as collector, while offering through its narrator as participant a conspiratorial glimpse into the liberating quality of the secret life of the locality. The moral's restored orderliness of closure is itself testament to the victory of orality over its condescension, for the moral is itself a world turned upside down, mocked by a folk world free of its control. Yet it is the assertion of that control with which the poem ends, because that is what

poems do: they close out the stories which run on in and through one another, and draw a line under and put a period to what they relate. "Remember" is the instruction of the poem's last line: a memorialization which emphasizes closure, just as Burns himself, like other collectors, created single canonical versions of altering and varied songs for Johnson's *Musical Museum*. But although "Nae man can tether time or tide" (l. 67), Tam's ride is from one riot to another, one zone of "unpublicized speech, nonexistent from the point of view of literary language" to another. The printed page presents what Bakhtin calls "only a small and polished portion of these unpublicized spheres of speech" (Bakhtin 1984: 421), and does so in a hybrid style that publicizes the very instability of register it officially seeks to erase. So much of the effect of this great poem, truly if only partly written in what Wordsworth, in debt to the linguistic politics of Burns's own bardic prefaces (Johnston 1998: 86–7; Pittock 2003) would term the ordinary language of men in a state of vivid sensation. In that sense the whole poem is compressed into half a line: "Weel done, Cutty-sark!" "And in an instant all was dark" (ll. 189–90): dark, that is, to the orderly arrangements of antiquarianism's version of a folklore eviscerated of its native speech. "Tam o' Shanter" remains free of its poet's control – designedly so, for the subject is the poet: occult in the sense of "hidden," not just the gothic version delighted in for public consumption. Tam the Chanter conceals Rab the Ranter in a poem written by Robert Burns for Francis Grose. Burns is thus no peasant poet, but he deploys the voice of the peasantry to challenge the tale he appears to tell.

See also ch. 41, "Poetry Beyond the English Borders."

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PART III
Forms and Genres

25
Rhyming Couplets and Blank Verse

Richard Bradford

The Royal Society was founded in 1662, shortly after the Cromwellian Protectorate had given way to the restoration of the monarchy, and in succeeding decades established itself as a kind of barometric guide to developments in key areas of thinking and writing. Its best-known and most widely quoted statement of purpose occurs in Thomas Sprat's 1667 *History of the Royal Society* (and for "History" we might read "manifesto"):

> [The resolution of the Royal Society has been] to reject all amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style; to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men, delivered so many *things* almost in an equal number of *words*. They have extracted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking, positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness as they can . . . (ii. 117–18)

Sprat respects the status of language as an arbitrary, self-determined medium of representation – there can be only an "almost" equal number of things and words – but he also makes it clear that the ideal, the objective, is linguistic transparency.

At the same time that Sprat and others were evolving a comprehensive model of language, others were considering language's principal aesthetic province, poetry, and pursuing similar objectives. Chief among them was John Dryden. Dryden is best known as a poet, but his work as a critic was equally significant. Often he promised to write an "English Prosodia," a comprehensive account of the form and nature of English verse, and, although this never materialized as a single text, the dozens of prefaces that attended his plays and longer poems and his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) contain the basics of a theory that would be influential for the next hundred years. He proposed that English could produce a version of the classical, quantitative foot, but that, while the latter was a unit of measure, length or duration, its modern counterpart was determined by stress and accent and limited to two syllables –

predominantly in the form of the iamb. Yet accent was not in itself sufficient to replace quantity as the key formal constituent of verse: "No man is tied in modern poesy to observe any farther role in the feet of his verse, but that they are disyllables . . . only he is obliged to rhyme . . . rhyme, and the observation of accent supplying the place of quantity" (*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, in Dryden 1926: 97). While Dryden accepted that the stanza would always feature in English verse, his ideal unit was the closed, balanced, decasyllabic couplet, and his criteria for this choice were similar to Sprat's. "But that benefit which I consider most in it, because I have not seldom found it, is, that it bounds and circumscribes the fancy. For imagination in a poet is a faculty so wild and lawless, that like a high ranging spaniel, it must have clogs tied to it, lest it outrun the judgment" (Preface to *The Rival Ladies*, in Dryden 1926: 8).

Throughout his criticism Dryden returns frequently to two significant points: that verse must formally establish its status as a discourse separate from all others by signaling the presence of the line; and that the defining, formal constituents of poetry should be deployed as a means of organizing, even clarifying, sense rather than complicating it.

Dryden's favorite couplet, which would be presented ceaselessly by subsequent critics as setting the standard to be followed, was Denham's description of the Thames from his *Cooper's Hill* (1642).

> Though deep, yet clear; though gentle, yet not dull;
> Strong without rage; without o'erflowing full.
> (ll. 191–2)

This couplet maintained an almost fetishistic fascination for eighteenth-century commentators because it came as close as was thought possible to making poetry as functional and transparent as prose while retaining its status as an art form. The iambic pattern is regular but not monotonous, the caesurae and demi-caesurae of each line maintain a balance between the structure of the verse and a concatenation of simple antitheses, yet the construction is saved from too glib a symmetry by slight variations in pace and punctuation. The effect is almost entirely dependent upon the formal identity of the couplet, the continual counterposing of the flexible with the rigid. This would become the perfect vehicle for expressing such states of mind or modes of apprehension as the Augustan tendency to perceive pleasant if rather nerveless paradoxes in the natural world.

Donald Davie in *Articulate Energy* considered the way in which the Augustan couplet deploys syntax: "it follows a form of action, a movement not through my mind but through the world at large" (1955: 79) and, adopting a similar approach, Allan Rodway (1966) averred that Augustan poetic syntax is distinguished from the Romantic and the Modern by its tendency to express *relationships* rather than *states*. Both arguments are founded upon the premise that the eighteenth-century couplet impeded the interference of the poet or text in "the world at large" and by implication succeeded in allying poetry with the much broader eighteenth-century ideals and imperatives of "order"

in politics, society, architecture, and philosophic thought. More recent criticism has extended this thesis. Laura Brown states: "Pope's art is at once a mode of representation and an act of adjudication through which an elaborate and sophisticated linguistic structure, emulative of the imperial age of Roman culture, shapes a 'world' where rhetoric, belief and morality perfectly intersect" (1985: 7). Brown's point is based on the overarching poststructuralist notion that the "world," or at least our perception of and engagement with it, is dependent upon the mediating function of language.

There is evidence to suggest that in focusing upon the closed couplet as their ideal poetic vehicle the Augustans were fully aware of the fact that they were indeed employing an "elaborate and sophisticated linguistic structure" to "shape" their world. For example, Francis Atterbury, in his preface to the *Second Part of Mr Waller's Poems*, treats Waller as Denham's equal in the reformation of a form that in the early seventeenth century had, in Atterbury's view, been shapeless and dissolute. Atterbury argues that Donne's couplets had created deliberate, arbitrary dispersals of unitary meaning. "Their [Donne's and his contemporaries] Verses ran all into one another, and hung together, throughout a whole copy, like the *Hook't Attoms* that compose a Body in *Des Cartes* . . . Mr. Waller bound up his thoughts in a cadence more fitting to his world and agreeable to the nature of the verse he wrote in" (1690: sigs. A5^{v}–A6^{r}).

Compare the following extracts from Pope's rewritten version of Donne's *Satyres* with the original.

Pope: Not more Amazement seiz'd on *Circe's* Guests,
To see themselves fall endlong into Beasts,
Than mine, to find a Subject staid and wise,
Already half turned Traytor by surprise.
(ll. 66–9)

Donne: I more amaz'd than Circe's prisoner's when
They felt themselves turn beasts, felt myself then
Becoming Traytor, and me thought I saw
One of our Giant Statutes ope his jaw.
(ll. 129–30)

Donne's use of enjambment is mimetic but it is not an attempt to reproduce an orderly state of mind. The relationship between pronouns, relative pronouns, and verbs is constantly unsettled by the intervention of the line endings, and as a consequence the speaker seems in uncertain command of his subject – a characteristic and deliberate use of verse form to represent perplexity as an element of the human condition. Pope substitutes for enjambment a thoughtful, confident progression, and the speaker appears to be in full control both of his perceptual registers and of his text.

The following is from Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (1711):

'Tis with our judgments, as our watches; none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.

> In poets as true genius is but rare
> True taste as seldom is the critic's share;
> Both must alike from Heav'n derive their light,
> These born to judge, as well as those to write.
> Let such teach others who themselves excel,
> And censure freely who have written well.
> Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,
> But are not critics to their judgment too?
> (ll. 9–18)

The most remarkable thing about this passage is the way in which the couplet virtually appropriates the role usually discharged by the sentence. The linguistic concept of "cohesion" involves the identification of ties between consecutive sentences in a text. It is employed to demonstrate that coherent prose depends upon there being links between sentences to the extent that each cannot properly be understood without knowledge of the others. In Pope's passage the couplet becomes the principal unit of cohesion.

The theme of literary evaluation as a relative, variable faculty is established in the first couplet. The second, the main clause of a longer sentence, personifies these variables in the figures of the poet and the critic, and the third couplet, the modifying clause, picks up this tie ("Both must"). The fourth couplet, again a complete sentence, returns to the pre-established theme of the division between poetical and critical inclinations, and the fifth offers a new perspective upon the poet–critic comparison of couplet two.

It appears to be demonstrably the case that Pope uses the couplet to create an ever-broadening thematic spiral, with each one variously extending, qualifying, or illustrating a point previously established. I use the term "appears to be" because Pope also cautiously avoids the kind of formal interweaving of couplets apparent in Donne's verse. Indeed, it is possible to rearrange the passage so that, while the overall message is less well coordinated than the original, it does not completely lose its coherence in the way a prose passage would if one were to redistribute its sentences.

> Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,
> But are not critics to their judgment too?
> 'Tis with our judgments as our watches; none
> Go just alike but each believes his own.
> In poets as true genius is but rare
> True taste as seldom is the critic's share.
> Let such teach others who themselves excel
> And censure freely who have written well.
> Both must alike from Heav'n derive their light
> These born to judge, as well as those to write.

Dryden's concern regarding the specificity of the poetic line was symptomatic of a widespread anxiety that English verse was less formally secure than its classical

predecessor. By the time that the couplet had reached its apogee in the work of Pope, the line had not only become invulnerable as a formal integer, it had also begun to function as a unit of sense rather than merely a supplement to grammar and syntax. Indeed, a number of critics of the mid-eighteenth century set about producing guides to the stylistics of poetry which drew upon contemporaneous practice while explaining and adjudicating for the benefit of potential poets.

In his *Elements of Criticism* (1762), for example, Henry Home, Lord Kames, provides a kind of DIY guide to assembling a good couplet.

> In the first line of a couplet, the concluding pause differs little, if at all, from the pause that divides the line; and for that reason, the rules are applicable to both equally. The concluding pause of the couplet is in a different condition: it resembles greatly the concluding pause in an Hexameter line. Both of them indeed are so remarkable, that they never can be graceful, unless where they accompany a pause in the sense. (ii. 137–8)

Kames goes on to pronounce on such matters as the placing of the "capital pause" (caesura) which, except in rare moments of license and abandon, must occur at the fourth, fifth, sixth, or seventh syllables of the line to maintain balance and symmetry. Most significantly, he claims that the given, permissible range of options and variations available to the poet correspond predictably with such effects upon the reader as elevation, joy, depression, sadness, enervation, etc. (ii. 149–60).

The heroic couplet dominated verse during the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century. Numerically, far more poems used it than any other form, with blank verse next, the octosyllabic couplet third, and the stanza taking up the rear (for detailed statistics see Havens 1922). It was ideally suited to the gradual shift in the status of poetry as it began to occupy generic territory that in other periods was the exclusive reserve of the essay or the newspaper article. Verse could directly engage with contemporary political issues (the field of the so-called "poem on affairs of state") or, in the more discursive, "georgic" mode, could address a virtually unlimited range of subjects: thus architecture, dress sense, the sanitary conditions of the streets and the practical conventions of sheep husbandry all vied for the poet's attention. In this environment the closed, balanced couplet was valued because while it was self-evidently poetic – it attended to a given metrical and rhyming formula – its structural features and their effects were, as Kames and many others demonstrated, relatively predictable. It became like a subsidiary to rhetoric, enabling the poet to write in a way that gave due attention to the progressive, transparent logic of good prose.

Those who transgressed this new system of conventions were widely rebuked. For example, throughout the eighteenth century practitioners of the enjambed couplet were treated as irresponsible eccentrics who were misusing a key element in the process of transference of sense from poet via text to reader: the line. There were certainly very few of them, the most notable being Isaac Watts (1674–1748) – a nonconformist preacher whose unorthodoxy in religion was mirrored in his use of off-rhymes and couplets resonant of Donne – and, later, Charles Churchill

(1731–64). A satirical parody of Churchill's technique offers a fair reflection of the critical consensus.

> And thou, sonorous Ch******, teach my line
> To flow exuberantly wild like thine:
> Teach me to twist a thought a thousand ways,
> And string with idle particles my lays;
> That, one poor sentiment exhausted, *when*
> The weary reader hopes a respite, *then*
> I may spring on with force redoubted, *till*
> I break him panting breathless to my will;
> And make him, tired in periods of a mile,
> Gape in deep wonder at my rapid stile.
> (Anon., *The Patriot Poet, a Satire*, 1764, ll. 167–76)

It is intriguing to compare this assured, almost authoritarian parody with the following piece by Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea.

> Happy you three! Happy the Race of Men!
> Born to inform or to correct the Pen
> To profits, pleasures, freedom and command
> While we beside you but as Cyphers stand
> T'increase your Numbers and to swell th'account
> Of your delights which from our charms amount,
> And sadly are by this distinction taught
> That since the Fall (by our seducement wrought)
> Ours is the greater losse as ours the fault.

Finch's use of enjambment here is shrewd and ingenious. She frequently employs a technique known as *contre-rejet*; in basic terms, a double-take where syntax seems to have completed its specification of sense yet then moves on to elaborate on or even disrupt the point already made. This sense of ambiguity is paralleled by the constant shifts in the semantic centre of gravity between three themes; the image of wealth and acquisition, the activity of writing, and the condition of sexual dominance. Each of the principal noun-and-verb phrases resonates with a semantic trace which unsettles its apparent, syntactically determined meaning. In the third line, for example, the word "profits" carries forward a residual sense of the benefits of writing (to profit by informing or correcting the activities of the "Pen"), a sense which will be transformed into a pattern of financial images: "Cyphers," "Numbers," "swell th'account," "amount." The three conditions of "pleasures, freedom and command" are similarly dispersed through several subsequent semantic registers. There are the "pleasures, freedom and command" of writing about women, the "cyphers" (subjects) of poems whose "Numbers" (a contemporary term denoting measure and syllabic length) will

as a consequence "increase" and "swell." Carried along with this pattern are images of sexual pleasure, freedom, and command: women are "Cyphers," child-bearers who increase the dynastic "Numbers," and they are also the source of more straightforward sexual "delights," an adverb surrounded by the phallic *double entendres* of "increase," "swell" and "amount."

The word which at once synthesizes and disrupts these various patterns of form and signification is "Pen." Both feminist and non-feminist critics have often remarked, sometimes farcically, upon the drift between the semantic and contextual conditions of "pen" and "penis," and Finch would indeed seem to have created an intriguing interplay of text and context: it rhymes with men; it features as a vital instrument in the activities of financial gain and poetic endeavor; and its function in the pattern of sexual and procreative images seems clear enough.

Finch's achievements in this short passage are considerable. The rules and conventions embodied in Pope's verse – employed so mercilessly in his misogynistic *tour de force*, *An Epistle to a Lady* – and specified by Kames and others are variously transgressed and rewritten. She uses that instrument of formal integrity, the line, quite brilliantly to create a multilayered polyphonic text, combining a method and an effect that run against the predominant mood of Augustan writing: rather than causing the line and the sentence to cooperate as an exercise in forceful transparency, she has them conspire in a state of disruptive interference.

The Augustan couplet was a disciplined version of a form that had occupied a key place in English verse since Chaucer, but after 1667 it faced a competitor whose provenance was less clearly defined. Milton's *Paradise Lost* had an effect upon the compositional and interpretative conventions of the eighteenth century that is comparable with the effect of free verse in the twentieth. In the sixteenth century there had been a number of attempts, notably by Surrey, to establish blank verse as an acceptable medium for the nondramatic poem, but by 1667 it was agreed by general consensus that its role was limited to drama. There are a number of reasons for this demarcation between formal and generic types, and these are most clearly summarized by Dryden in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, published, with ironic timing, barely a year after Milton's poem. Correct blank verse observes the conventions of the iambic pentameter, but it does not rhyme; and Dryden and the vast majority of his contemporaries believed that rhyme was the only device by which accentual, rather than classical, quantitative, verse could signal the presence of the poetic line. Dryden called blank verse *prose mesurée*, and he regarded the measuring of syntax into iambic, decasyllabic units as insufficient to guarantee, for the hearer, the definitive component of poetry: the line. Milton, in his note on "The Verse" of *Paradise Lost*, disagreed. He stated that in his poem the "sense" would be "variously drawn out from one verse into another," claiming by implication – *contra* Dryden and everyone else – that the unrhymed pentameter possessed a sufficient degree of formal palpability to register as the point of regularity and stability against which syntax could be counterpointed.

Pedantic as all of this might seem today, its ramifications for the history of poetry were immense and diverse. Milton had, singlehandedly, invented a new poetic genre

and, just as significantly, prompted a debate that during the next century would raise questions regarding the essential nature of English poetry.

Samuel Woodford, in the preface to *A Paraphrase Upon the Canticles* (1679), avers that *Paradise Lost* is not a poem: "it wants the proper and particular Character, which we assign Verse, Rhythm [Woodford's deliberate, eccentric misspelling of Rhyme] I mean, and were it written as Prose usually is, in its just Periods, would both be read, and be, as indeed it is, no other than Poetical Prose" (sigs. $B6^r$–$B6^v$). To demonstrate his point he reprints a section from *Paradise Lost* as prose and a passage from one of Milton's political pamphlets as a kind of irregular blank verse.

In this single gesture Woodford, an otherwise obscure country parson, initiated a debate that would occupy the attention of a vast number of eighteenth-century critics and re-emerge in the twentieth century in the feud between New Criticism and its Reader-Centered counterpart. He raised questions regarding the relationship between the abstract conception of metrical form and its concrete realization in the text; and, just as significantly, he implied that the reader's expectations played a role in this.

John Rice, in his *Introduction to the Art of Reading with Energy and Propriety* (1765), takes up where Woodford left off, claiming that blank verse is an illusion, "unless, indeed, we suppose the Standard of Verse erected in The Printing-House, and that a Compositor can convert Prose into Verse at Pleasure, by printing it in detached Lines of ten Syllables" (p. 177). He goes on to redraft passages from *Paradise Lost* as a form of free verse with lines of varying length determined by dramatic and accentual centers of gravity.

John Walker in *Elements of Elocution* (1781) and Joshua Steele in *Prosodia Rationalis* (1779) expanded upon Rice's thesis and proposed a completely new and radical model for English meter (pre-empting, almost two centuries in advance, the celebrated breakthrough of the two linguists Trager and Smith in 1951). They argued and convincingly demonstrated that the binary opposition of stress and unstress upon which that mainstay of English meter, the iamb, was founded, was a fiction. They claimed instead that English verse was composed of an immensely complex continuum of relative stress values. Steele devised a system of notation to document this which makes a musical score look simplistic and sometimes veers towards the whimsy of *Tristram Shandy*, but the conclusions of both critics were clear. Although they did not coin the term "free verse," they agreed that attempts to make English comply with expectations established in Greek and Latin went against the state of the language: flexibility in line length and structure was the natural condition of English verse. All of these critics based their postulations exclusively upon readings of *Paradise Lost*.

Thomas Sheridan, in his *Lectures on the Art of Reading* (1775), offered an alternative system of interpretation. He contended that, while the unrhymed pentameter does indeed disclose English stress patterns as variable and contingent, Milton had compensated for this by his distribution of syntactic foci. In order to recognize the subtleties of this he proposes that readers employ at each line ending the "pause of suspension" – which, he points out, is neither a "sentential" nor a grammatical pause but rather a "Musical" one where words, like musical notes, are at once conjoined

yet discernibly distinct. What Sheridan claimed to have discovered in Milton was a radical and unprecedented method of writing. Milton's enjambments can, he argued, create two simultaneously present but distinct patterns of meaning, and he had made use of the pentameter line not just as a supplement to syntax but as a unit of signification in its own right. This is his reading of the familiar lines concerning Satan's ruminative torment:

> Now conscience wakes the bitter memory
> Of what he was, what is, and what must be
> Worse . . .
>
> What an amazing force does this position give to the word *worse*! And in what strong colours does it paint to us the desperate state of reprobation into which Satan has fallen! (Sheridan 1775: ii. 247–8)

His principal point is that the syntax seems to have reached a conclusion at "what must be," yet it moves on to "Worse" and sends a transformative semantic shock back along the sentence – an effect not possible in prose.

In truth, Sheridan's pause of suspension was the mandate for a practice which became fully acknowledged only in the twentieth century, under the title of "close reading." Christopher Ricks, Donald Davie, and John Hollander, among others, concentrate upon the same passages from Milton as Sheridan, employ virtually the same technique, and reach the same conclusions. They treat the text as an assembly of stationary, silent integers and offer complex, enlightening maps of interpretation (see Bradford 2002: 104–17).

The division between the perspectives of Rice, Walker, and Steele and that of Sheridan is fascinating for several reasons. In answer to how they could reach such different conclusions after reading the same poem, we might consult a more recent critic on virtually the same issues. Stanley Fish writes that "line endings exist by virtue of perceptual strategies rather than the other way around. Historically, the strategy that we know as 'reading (or hearing) poetry' has included paying attention to the line as a unit, but it is precisely that attention that has made the line as unit . . . available" (Fish 1980: 165–6). Conversely, one might argue that the eighteenth-century debate on the nature and effect of the unrhymed line was a produce of Milton's deliberate and complex strategy of writing.

The most fascinating feature of the work of Milton's eighteenth-century successors is that all of them systematically eradicated from it those elements of *Paradise Lost* that puzzled interpreters and caused the likes of Sheridan to become New Critics before their time. The most notorious example of this is Young's *Nights Thoughts* (1742–6), in which enjambments of any type rarely occur and the lines maintain the same degree of regularity and balance as those of the closed couplet. Most frequently, however, Milton's techniques would reappear in later verse in a subtly chastened form. In Thomson's *Seasons* we regularly encounter what is apparently the Miltonic imprint of counterpoint between the pentameter and syntax.

Thence expanding far,
The huge Dusk, gradual, swallows up the plain.
Vanish the woods. The dim-seen river seems
Sullen, and slow, to rowl the Misty Wave . . .
("Autumn," ll. 717–20)

The break between verb and adjective at "seems / Sullen" might superficially remind one of moments in *Paradise Lost*; but it should be noted that Thomson has made sure that "Sullen" is perfectly consistent with the developing sentence that precedes it – the "dim" river enshrouded in the gathering dusk could hardly be anything else. Compare with the following lines from Milton.

Thus with the year
Seasons return, but not to me returns
Day . . .
(iii. 40–2)

Sheridan remarks upon how "*Day* stops you unexpectedly and forcibly strikes the imagination with the immensity of his [Satan's] loss. He can no more see – what? – Day? – Day and all its glories rush into the mind" (ii. 246). Davie and Ricks comment on the sense of shock caused by the use of "Day" instead of, say, the more predictable "Spring."

In virtually every blank verse poem written in the eighteenth century we find the same cautious fettering of techniques as is evident in the above lines by Thomson. Run-on lines occur, but the poet always ensures that isolated words and phrases maintain the continuity of the preceding syntax, usually by sewing into the latter delicate warnings of what will follow the line break.

In answering the question why this curious collective act of formal censorship occurred, we should first consult a passage from the work of Henry Home, Lord Kames. While Sheridan, an elocutionist, falls into the category of the open-minded interpreter, willing to adapt expectations to the actualities of reading, Kames was of the prescriptive school of criticism, always testing the text against authorized criteria. In his *Elements of Criticism* Kames is concerned by the extent to which Milton unsettles the relationship between language and the prelinguistic world. On the following lines,

Now in loose garlands thick thrown off, the bright
Pavement . . .
(*Paradise Lost*, iii. 362–3)

he comments: "colour, for example, cannot be conceived independent of the surface coloured; but a tree may be conceived, as growing in a certain spot, as of a certain kind, and as spreading its extended branches all around, without ever thinking of its

colour" (Kames 1762: ii. 130–1). He regards Milton as having transgressed certain fundamental principles of writing.

> Killing cannot be conceived without a being that is put to death, nor painting without the surface upon which the colours are spread. On the other hand, an action and the thing on which it is exerted, are not, like subject and quality, united in one individual object . . . [It is] possible to take the action to pieces, and to consider it first with relation to the agent, and next with relation to the patient. But after all, so intimately connected are the parts of the thought, that it requires an effort to make a separation even for a moment: the subtilising to such a degree is not agreeable, especially in works of imagination. (ii. 133)

Kames's thesis is consistent with prevailing contemporary ideas on language; but intriguingly he is not discussing the potential merely of grammar. He assumes that the single act of putting language into poetic form is to place in jeopardy its given and accepted range of grammatical relationships. In modern terms, he is arguing that while the conventions of nonpoetic discourse secure the axis involving relations between particular signifiers and between signifiers, signifieds, and the referential continuum, poetry by its nature undermines it. But before we celebrate Kames as an eighteenth-century precursor to Jakobson we should remember that he was not only disclosing what poetry could do but contributing to a general consensus on rules that would curb these latent tendencies.

The only poems that reproduced the Miltonic tension between line structure and syntax and created a consequent complexity of meaning were parodies of *Paradise Lost*, most notably John Philips's *The Splendid Shilling* and *Cyder*, which bear comparison with the infamous E. J. Thribb's *Private Eye* excursions into radical free verse. Philips brilliantly imitates Milton's use of the pentameter as a syntactic supplement, delaying the completion of sense and then subtly disrupting expectations. But the surprise is usually farcical, as when the heroic "Cambro Briton"

> O'er many a craggy Hill, and barren Cliff,
> Upon a Cargo of fam'd *Cestrian* Cheese,
> High-overshadowing rides . . .
> (*The Splendid Shilling*, ll. 26–8)

The poets who elected to seriously employ Milton's new sub-genre effectively neutralized its more controversial features. John Dennis, for example, was in his criticism one of the earliest and most enthusiastic apologists for *Paradise Lost*, arguing that Milton had shown rhyme to be superfluous to English verse. Yet in his own blank verse poems he used the pentameter as a means of measuring out syntax, a technique that would reappear in the blank verse of Addison and Young.

A number of poets regarded Milton as setting a precedent for narrative or epic verse that would enable English poetry to at last stand comparison with the likes of Homer.

Lyttelton's *Blenheim* (1727), Glover's *Leonidas* (1737) and *Atheniad* (1787), Mallet's *Amyntor and Theodora* (1747), and Cumberland's *Calvary; or The Death of Christ* (1792) were the more popular and widely praised efforts. What they all have in common is a generally successful attempt by the poet to make blank verse conform to the expectations of order and transparency embodied in the closed, balanced couplet. In his epic *Leonidas* Glover pays almost obsessive attention to preventing the line from interfering with the orderly progress of the narrative:

Mindful of their charge
The chiefs depart. Leonidas provides
His various armour. First the breastplate arms
His ample chest . . .
(viii. 119–22)

George Saintsbury commented drily that "one really begins to think that Glover (who was a city man) imagined that there was a run on blank verse, and tried to stop it by telling the sum out in half guineas on the counter."

Most of the most popular and famous blank verse poems after *The Seasons* tended to use narrative as an illustrative digression from the main business of, in varying proportion, description, disquisition, reflection, and philosophizing. Joseph Warton's "The Enthusiast: or the Lover of Nature" (1744), Somervile's *The Chace* (1735), Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757), Armstrong's *Art of Preserving Health* (1744), Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination* (1745), Dodsley's *Agriculture* (1753), Hurdis's "The Village Curate" (1788), and, of course, Cowper's *The Task* (1785) all appear to have employed blank verse as an ideal vehicle for the pictorial image. Their most significant passages involve a form of narrative in reverse, with the eye of the poet carrying the interpretative resources of the reader across a largely stationary assembly of images. Echoes of Milton are evident in each, but tempered by the standard set by Pope in the century's most celebrated nature poem, in couplets, *Windsor-Forest*.

Windsor-Forest was praised by Sheridan and many others for the manner in which Pope had adapted a form best suited to rhetorical warfare to the task of representing the natural world. The intrinsic capacity of the couplet to confer symmetry and balance upon polemical declamation became a framing device for the notion of landscape in which chaotic contingency is informed by a vestigial impression of order. But, inferred Sheridan, this sometimes went too far when the "neatness [of the landscape] is still increased in comparing a greater number of lines, and observing the relative proportion of the couplets to each other, in point of similarity and diversity" (Sheridan 1775: ii. 161). Daniel Webb in his *Remarks on the Beauties of Poetry* (1762) maintains, similarly, that in *Windsor-Forest* "you cannot but be sensible, how the enthusiasm is tamed by the precision of the couplet, and the consequent littleness of the scenery" (p. 19). Blank verse, however, was capable of emulating the effect of the natural world upon the poet, via "those sudden breaks or transitions in the verse, which so strongly characterise the passions; and dart as it were a sentiment to the utmost soul of the

reader" (pp. 20–1). Webb was suggesting that the unpredictable relationship between the lines and syntax in blank verse was the ideal formal counterpart to the equally contingent affinities between nature, perception, and emotion. Webb's thesis sounds radical, but in practice eighteenth-century blank verse stayed within the prescribed regulations governing language, verse form, and representation. Consider the following from Cowper's *The Task*:

> Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain
> Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er
> Conducts the eye along his sinuous course
> Delighted.
>
> (i. 163–6)

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton would have ended the line after rather than before "Conducts," creating just for a second an impression that the syntax will proceed with an objective account of the river's movement and causing the reader to expect the continuation to be something like "conducts / Its glassy thread" or "conducts / The solitary vessel." The revelation that it "conducts / The eye" would create the kind of tension between material and emotive registers that Kames found in Milton and regarded as disruptive of the referential function of language. Instead, however, Cowper creates a pause between the two-line description of the Ouse and the active verb which links this with the perspective of the poet. An orderly distinction is maintained between the scene perceived and the perceiver, and no doubts are cast upon the ability of language to faithfully mediate such states.

These lines and their neutralizing effect upon Milton's precedent were probably in Wordsworth's mind as he composed the famous opening passage to "Tintern Abbey":

> Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs
> That on a wild secluded scene impress
> Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
>
> (ll. 4–8)

The verbs "impress" and "connect," by virtue of their position, operate as double foci, shifting between aspects of the scenery as apprehended objectively and the impressionistic effects of this. We are led to expect that the cliffs will literally "impress" themselves upon the landscape but then find that they convey "thoughts" to the perceiver. Similarly, the notion of the landscape connecting with the sky, the horizon, becomes interwoven with the perceiver's role in connecting the actual panorama with thoughts of quietness and seclusion. The effect is Miltonic, and it would not have been attempted by an eighteenth-century blank verse poet.

The most pertinent comment on eighteenth-century blank verse technique comes from Wordsworth in "Home at Grasmere."

> Dreamlike the blending of the whole
> Harmonious landscape; all along the shore
> The boundary lost, the line invisible
> That parts the image from reality . . .

The "line" is the poetic line, made much more visible again after its deliberate loss during the preceding century as indeed the "boundary" (a familiar substitute in the eighteenth century for "line ending") capable of "parting the image from reality."

Most eighteenth-century poets and critics agreed that blank verse was by its nature a more flexible device than the couplet, and that as a consequence it broadened the expressive and formal range of poetic discourse. However, both were throughout this period subjected to an overarching compositional and aesthetic dictum: the mechanisms of verse form should function as mediators and receptors of the prelinguistic continuum. If they appeared to play some role in the shaping of this continuum, then they had begun to raise questions regarding the status of language itself – questions addressed by Milton and Wordsworth in their verse and more recently within the vastness of post-Saussurean linguistics.

See also chs. 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 23, "William Cowper, *The Task*"; 26, "Epic and Mock-Heroic"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics."

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26
Epic and Mock-Heroic

Richard Terry

Attitudes Toward Epic

When Dryden published his *Works of Virgil* in 1697, he prefixed to the *Aeneid* a long dedicatory epistle to the Earl of Mulgrave discussing the properties of epic poetry. He begins with a ringing endorsement of a conviction found elsewhere in his critical writing: "A HEROIC poem, truly such, is undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform." So much becomes a critical truism in the English Augustan era, one which other leading writers, such as Alexander Pope, have no reservation in endorsing. Though ranked by Aristotle beneath tragedy in the hierarchy of genres, the epic was thought to be the loftiest of all kinds of nondramatic writing, comprising a literary summit which could be approached only humbly and falteringly after a candidate had surmounted the foothills of pastoral and georgic. The poetic career of the Roman poet Virgil had exemplified such an ideal graduation: a path self-consciously followed in the eighteenth century (if not quite all the way to its epic pinnacle) by Pope.

Much of the theorizing of epic in England from the mid-seventeenth century through to the close of the eighteenth takes its cue from the twinned treatises of William Davenant and Thomas Hobbes, published in 1650. Davenant's preface to *Gondibert* introduced several persistent themes. While acknowledging Homer as the great pioneer of the form, Davenant cautions against undue reliance on epic precedent; he advocates that the action of epics should always pass before a tribunal of "credibility"; and he enshrines the notion that an epic should serve an essentially didactic purpose. These propositions are in large part endorsed by Hobbes in his responding essay, and they become the accepted lore of English epic criticism (Swedenberg 1953).

A new critical construction of epic becomes available in the 1680s when the ideas contained in the French critic Le Bossu's *Traité du poème épique* seep into the English consciousness. As early as 1682, the Earl of Mulgrave felt able to announce that Le

Bossu had discovered the "sacred Mysteries" of heroic poetry, but it is perhaps not until 1695 that the full cultural importation of Le Bossu's theories is achieved. In this year appears Richard Blackmore's controversial epic poem *Prince Arthur*, to which the author supplied a critical preface on the nature of epic which deliberately sought to align the work with Le Bossu's precepts.

For Blackmore, "An Epick Poem is a feign'd or devis'd Story of an *Illustrious Action*, related in Verse, in an *Allegorical*, *Probable*, *Delightful*, and *Admirable* manner, to cultivate the Mind with Instructions of Virtue." The kind of virtues necessary to be inculcated are "Noble and Princely" ones, which he enumerates as "Fortitude, Wisdom, Piety, Moderation, [and] Generosity." The idea that an epic poem should instill virtue, and that the fable or story should be wrought specifically to this end, were the most influential of all Le Bossu's precepts. Le Bossu's criticism was also to a high degree formulaic. He believed in the force of epic precedent: that modern epic practitioners were duty-bound to comply with the models established by Homer and Virgil and with the "rules" codified from the former by Aristotle. Moreover, the *method* of criticism that his theories seemed to demand was one that entailed ticking off such compliance under a set of heads: fable, moral, characters, language, and so on. All these general ideas coalesce in Blackmore's preface of 1695. Throughout the essay, he taxonomizes his own and other epic poems along the lines laid down by Le Bossu, and he endorses Le Bossu's governing conviction that no epic poem could expect success unless bound to the ancient rules. Indeed, he cheekily observes that the reason why all modern poets have failed in their attempts at epic is not perhaps owing to a "want of *Genius*" so much as to "their Ignorance of the Rules of writing such a Poem; or at least, from their want of attending to them."

In his preparedness to be associated with Le Bossu's ideas, Blackmore was far from putting himself out on a limb; in fact, he was being prescient, catching the literary critical wave even before it had crested, and certainly before most of his contemporaries. It was a wave, indeed, that swept up most significant commentators on epic around the turn of the century. Dryden, for example, remarked with striking assurance that "Spenser wanted only to have read the rules of Bossu," and Pope endorses Bossu's ideas in the essay he appended to his translation of the *Odyssey*, "A General View of the Epic Poem, and of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Extracted from *Bossu*" (Swedenberg 1953).

No less influenced by Bossu's ideas was John Dennis, best known now for his protracted and spiteful feuding with Pope. Yet there are a couple of issues on which Dennis departs from both Blackmore and Le Bossu. One of these concerns the unapologetic formalism evident in the *Traité*, and the impression given by both Le Bossu and Blackmore that the rules were valued *for their own sake*, and on strength of precedent, rather than because they embodied rational principles. For Dennis, Blackmore's pontification about "*Aristotle*'s excellent Rules of Poetry" was essentially empty without the addition that their necessity owed to their being "the pure Dictates of Reason and Repetitions of the Laws of Nature."

In registering this note of dissent, Dennis is reinforcing the rationalism that distinguishes the earlier criticism of epic by the likes of Davenant and Hobbes, but in

other areas we find him striking out on his own. Perhaps the most salient aspect of his *Remarks on a Book Entitled Prince Arthur* (1696) is his conviction that a prime characteristic of epic is the type of emotion engendered by it. In particular, he believed epics should evoke pity and fear, emotions usually seen as the preserve of tragedy, and the absence of which from *Prince Arthur* he considers to be a major defect. This aspect of Dennis's essay was perhaps not widely influential, but his ideas proved particularly pregnant in respect of genius, a concept to which his discussion gives an unusually high profile. Much as he thought compliance with the rules *as based on nature* to be imperative, Dennis also felt that this was not in itself sufficient. Also required was an infusion of "genius" (a forcefulness of conception) which he isolates as the *sine qua non* of one particular literary effect: the sublime (Monk 1935; Ashfield and de Bolla 1996).

Much as Dennis found himself ridiculed, especially by the Scriblerians, for his enthusiasm for sublimity, a modish and powerful effect in which the reader would be transported emotionally, his work in many respects pointed the way ahead [*see* chs. 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm," and 37, "The Sublime"]. Subsequent critics of epics are more willing to turn a blind eye to breaches of the rules where these are compensated for by a general force of genius, agreeing in spirit with the sentiments expressed in Pope's *Essay on Criticism* that "*License* is a *Rule*" and that "Great Wits sometimes may *gloriously offend*." Indeed, when Pope himself pens a critical essay on Homer's *Iliad*, prefaced to his translation, he lives up to his own general doctrine, praising Homer not for the "correctness" of his poem but for its rapture and sublimity. Any compositional vices of which Homer may be guilty are seen as inevitable, and condonable, by-products of his ebullient genius. Milton becomes another beneficiary of this tolerant, commonsensical approach, so that Dr. Johnson, while arguing that the reader might well have been spared the poet's superfluous digressions "at the beginning of the third, seventh, and ninth books" of *Paradise Lost*, is still prepared to defend them as fortunate errors: "superfluities so beautiful who would take away."

Dennis also plays a part in what was to be another revolution in critical attitudes toward epic: the rise in esteem for Milton and Spenser as English exponents of the genre. Dennis and Joseph Addison, in his *Spectator* papers on *Paradise Lost*, were to prove influential early campaigners on Milton's behalf and also helped to fix his credentials as a paragon of literary sublimity. Johnson puts the matter thus: "The characteristick quality of his poem is sublimity. He sometimes descends to the elegant, but his element is the great. He can occasionally invest himself with grace; but his natural port is gigantick loftiness." The eighteenth-century vogue for sublimity, introducing as it did a new standard for judging the success of an epic poem, was one factor contributing to the rise of Milton to a position of accepted equality with the classical poets Homer and Virgil (Griffin 1986). But Milton's admission to their august company was also made easier by his being himself a poet of strong classical leanings. A more intractable problem, however, was presented by the sixteenth-century poet, Spenser.

The eighteenth century looked on Spenser not as a classically inspired poet but as a throwback to the medieval age: *The Faerie Queene* was seen as rooted in a bygone

feudal world, and constructed in compliance with an aesthetic characterized as "rude" or gothic (Terry 2001). It was clear that *The Faerie Queene* could never be judged favorably against any standard that emanated from the great classical epics. Accordingly critics like John Hughes, who added two critical essays to his edition of Spenser's works in 1715, and Thomas Warton, whose *Observations on the Faerie Queene* came out in 1754 and in revised form eight years later, led a movement to assess the work against a more sympathetic set of standards [*see* ch. 35, "Recovering the Past: Shakespeare, Spenser, and British Poetic Tradition"]. For Hughes, indeed, to judge *The Faerie Queene* against the template of classical works would be no less inapt than "drawing a Parallel between the *Roman* and the *Gothick* Architecture." Under the attention of critics like Hughes and Warton, aspects of the work that had previously been derided – its quaint style, heavy-handed allegorizing, and teeming imagination – all became rehabilitated as evidence of the poem's success in the terms of its own particular aesthetic. Of course, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, as a romance epic, has ties of indebtedness to earlier poems of the same kind, such as Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, which were of little or no interest to later poets in the classical epic vein. The advancement of Spenser's reputation, however, can still be seen as part of a general softening of the rule-based criticism of epic characteristic of the seventeenth century.

I will return to the idea of the sublime later on, but it is important to note here that this busy theorizing about epic poetry stood in inverse relation to an appetite actually to compose such poems. Much the most high-profile exponent of the genre in the English Augustan era was Richard Blackmore, who produced two Arthurian epics, *Prince Arthur* (1695) and *King Arthur* (1697), and two later works on similar scale, *Eliza* (1705) and *Alfred* (1723). The pages of Blackmore's sonorous poems are little disturbed nowadays, even by eighteenth-century specialists, and the same could be said for another poem that received a fair amount of attention in its own time, Richard Glover's *Leonidas* (1737), a blank-verse epic about the battle of Thermopylae. Blackmore and Glover, though prominent literary figures in their day, languish now as irretrievably minor writers, and when the greatest poetic talents of the English Augustan era engaged with epic, this took the form not so much of original composition as translation. Dryden, for example, had translated Virgil's *Aeneid* in 1697, and Pope in his turn undertook a sole-authored rendering of Homer's *Iliad* from 1715 to 1720, and a collaborative one of the *Odyssey* in 1725–6. The two translations were enormously lucrative for Pope, and his version of the *Iliad*, in particular, drew lavish praise: Dr. Johnson, for example, declared it to be "certainly the noblest version of poetry which the world has ever seen." It should be noted that in translating Homer, Pope was not taking a holiday from his own individual creativity: his translation is rather the highest expression of that creativity.

That an age that so much venerated the epic form should have produced so few epic poems has come to be seen as something of a paradox, though the strength of that veneration must itself have figured as a strong deterrent to literary pretenders. One factor that may explain the conundrum is that eighteenth-century readers did

not remain untouched by reservations, if not about epic itself as a literary form, then about the martial and barbaric culture from which it had seemingly sprung and which it seemed to glorify (Rawson 1982, 1994). The nature of this equivocation is captured by Cowley in his remark that "a warlike, various, and a tragical age is best to *write of*, but worst to *write in*." Even a writer as ardently committed to the glories of the classical past as Pope could not avoid sometimes wincing at that "spirit of cruelty which appears too manifestly in the Iliad." Pope's remark here is a momentary surge of revolt in the context of an abiding allegiance, but for writers of a non-classical stamp, such as Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, no such circumambient allegiance existed. Ian Watt, for example, has described Defoe's attitude to epic as one of "casual depreciation," and in his scorn for the unwholesome morality of epic Defoe was joined by Richardson. In a letter to Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson can be found lambasting the "fierce, fighting Iliad" for both celebrating and spawning a culture of bellicosity which, passing down the ages, has "ravaged the earth, and made it a field of blood." Much the same sentiments occur also in his novel *Sir Charles Grandison*, where Lady Charlotte asks to know "Of what violences, murders, depredations have not the epic poets been the occasion?" (Watt 1957).

This realization that the epic world, whatever the cultural standing of the key artifacts which had emanated from it, was an inherently violent one, had been a constitutive factor in the only work revered by the Augustans as an illustrious vernacular epic, Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Though *Paradise Lost* conforms to the generic template of epic, the moral values it expresses are at an opposite pole from, and deliberately designed to rebuff, the martial bluster of traditional epic. Milton's values are not merely more pious but also more undemonstrative than heroic ones, consisting of a Christ-like "patience and heroic martyrdom," these being expressly contrasted with the ones spawned by the epic and romance cult of war, "hitherto the only argument / Heroic deemed." At the end of the poem, Adam comes to assume a personal placidity wholly at odds with the vaunting energy of the traditional epic hero, realizing that "to obey is best, / And love with fear the only God."

Not only was the morality of epic unappealing to many, then, but writers like Pope were aware that the only English epic poem on which they could fall back, *Paradise Lost*, had expressly disavowed it. This is one factor that may explain why Pope, who for many years kept under contemplation the idea of writing a nationalistic epic of his own, never brought such a project to fruition. Yet while both Dryden and Pope channeled some of their reverence for classical epic into translation (a way of "making" an epic without having to endorse its values), they also turned to another form through which they could engage with epic content and conventions through an intervening screen of irony: the mock-heroic.

Mock-Heroic

The genre of mock-heroic was taken up in England as an import from Italy and France (Bond 1932): the earliest instance of the kind is probably Alessandro Tassoni's *La*

Secchia Rapita, published pseudonymously in 1622, and depicting a feud, fomented by the seizure of a bucket, between two thirteenth-century Italian peoples: the Modenese and the Bolognians. The poem went through numerous editions in the next century and a half, and was translated into English in 1710 by John Ozell, who inserted into his long title the annotative detail: "A Mock-Heroic Poem, The First of the Kind." The earliest work to capitalize on Tassoni's seems to have been the French poet Boileau's heroi-comical poem *Le Lutrin* (from 1674), which recounts a feud between the priest and choirmaster of a French church, in which the former tries to reinstall an old reading-desk expressly so as to obscure his rival from the sight of the congregation. There are several early renderings into English, though the first full translation, once more by Ozell, is in 1708.

The translation into English of these early mock-epics was accompanied by a recognition of the newness of the kind of writing they exemplified. When, for example, Nicholas Rowe contributes a discussion of the mock-heroic form to John Ozell's translation of *Le Lutrin*, he professes reluctance to attempt a "Critical Account" of a mode of writing "that is so new in the World, and of which we have had so few Instances." Moreover, what instances there are he sees as standing in a direct line of descent from *La Secchia Rapita*, which is "the first of this Sort that was ever written." The foreign extraction of the mock-heroic kind also forms the basis of a rather self-serving anecdote recorded by Francis Lockier (later Dean of Peterborough) about his first brush with the famous poet Dryden. As a seventeen-year-old, Lockier was in the habit of visiting Will's coffee-house so as to rub shoulders with the literary eminences who gathered there. Happening to hear Dryden injudiciously talking up his *Mac Flecknoe* as "the first piece of ridicule written in heroics," the young Lockier summoned up the pluck to object that Boileau's *Lutrin* and Tassoni's *Secchia Rapita* better deserved the title of originals, being poems from which Dryden had himself borrowed. "'Tis true," replied Dryden, "I had forgot them."

The essential technique of mock-heroic consists of a comic breaching of the canon of fit style – the principle, that is, that the content and style of a work should be in sympathy with each other: we see this principle in practice when Dryden praises Horace for achieving a style "constantly accommodated to his subject, either high or low." Early usages of the term "mock-heroic" emphasize the way in which such works bring together a high style and low or trivial subject matter. John Ozell, for example, in the dedication to his translation of *Le Lutrin*, defines mock-heroic as "a Ridiculous Action made considerable in Heroic Verse"; and John Quincy, in the preface to his translation of Edward Holdsworth's *Muscipula* (2nd edn., 1714), cites *Le Lutrin* and Samuel Garth's *The Dispensary* as representative examples of mock-heroic, defining their technique as "raising the Diction, and labouring the Poetry most, where the Matter is lowest, and most proper for Ridicule." The achievement of a conspicuous elevation of style could best be achieved by mimicking the conventions of classical epic or by adopting the traits of an heroic style, these being identified alternatively with the closed decasyllabic couplet practiced by Pope in his translation of Homer's *Iliad* or with the sprawling grandiloquence of *Paradise Lost*.

The first great incarnation of the mock-heroic form in English is rightly seen as Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* (1682) which lampoons two of the shallower literary talents of Dryden's day, Richard Flecknoe and Thomas Shadwell (Jack 1952; Hammond 1985). The action of the poem consists of Flecknoe's abdication from the throne of dullness and the coronation of his successor, Shadwell, this conceit enacting a degrading parody of the relation between Aeneas and his son Ascanius in Virgil's great epic. The idea of harnessing a mock-heroic irony to the denigration of particular named (or hinted at) individuals, and moreover of subsuming these within the general defamatory category of dulness, was to exert a pronounced influence on one of the great achievements of eighteenth-century mock-heroic, Pope's *The Dunciad* (1728). However, the poem most responsible for the importation of Boileau's mock-heroic method into English is not Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* but Garth's *The Dispensary* (1699), which recounts in allegorical form the feud between proponents and opponents of a dispensary intended to make available cheap medicines for the poor (Ellis 1965; Cook 1980; Colomb 1992). It begins with the god Sloth, who has long presided over the College of Physicians, being awoken by the sounds of the new dispensary being constructed. Determined to thwart the project, he sends his servant Phantom to rouse the apothecaries, the group whose livelihoods would be directly challenged by the establishment of such a charitable institution. The apothecaries hold a counsel, modeled on the debate of the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost*, and elect to obstruct the dispensary by force. Canto 5 describes the ensuing battle against the dispensarians, which ceases when the goddess of Health intervenes and conducts one of the physicians, Colon, to the underworld. Here he is able to consult on how the conflict might be resolved with the medical pioneer William Harvey, who advises the College of Physicians once more to dedicate itself to the healing arts.

Garth's poem works by representing in a facetious and scaled-down form some of the numerous conventions of epic: presageful visitations, oratorical set-pieces, a battle scene, a journey to an underworld, and so on. This portfolio of effects is taken up in numerous later mock-heroic poems, among them Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, which appeared in 1712 and was reissued in expanded form two years later. Pope's poem registers "hits" against all the following epic conventions: the formal proposition of the poem's subject, a prognosticatory dream and warnings of impending calamity, a "machinery" of spirits or deities, the formal arming of the hero, a rallying speech to soldiers on the brink of war, a staged duel or battle, use of an engine to accomplish a military task, and a descent into a deathly underworld.

The Heroi-comical Poem

The *Rape* treats in allegorical form a social incident involving actual acquaintances of Pope's, in which Lord Petre had cut off, and retained as a trophy, a lock of hair from the head of the society belle Arabella Fermor. Pope had been asked to write the work by an intermediary, John Caryll, with a view to how a comic poem about

the incident might humor the contending parties into a reconciliation. The poem's success or failure in this regard remains unknown. One of the singularities of Pope's work is that of being the first one in English to adopt on its title-page the label of an "heroi-comical" poem, one which derives from Boileau's *Le Lutrin*. The expression was quickly pounced upon by critics, John Dennis predictably berating Pope for his affectation in adopting the term. Many critics nowadays isolate "heroi-comical" poems as a distinct category within mock-heroic, including in it poems that self-consciously adopt the label alongside others that do not (Broich 1990; Terry 2005). What characterizes the group is that the poems contained in it all address subjects that can be seen as affronting the standard of epic by being provocatively low or trivial. Nahum Tate's heroi-comical poem about tea, "Panacea" (1701), is typical in this regard in opening with a bout of ritualistic self-prostration over the "Slenderness of the Subject"; the same stratagem is also adopted by Pope, the subject of whose *Rape* is deemed apologetically to be "Slight," and by James Arbuckle, who in his poem "Snuff" (1719) solicits his reader not to think his "humble" topic "Too low a Trifle for the Poet's Strain."

The trivial artifacts or substances addressed in heroi-comical poems are invariably ones that stand in iconic relation to the eighteenth-century consumer revolution, a revolution whose effect was to create a proliferation of luxury goods, especially those contributing to personal adornment (Terry 2005). As well as Arbuckle's poem on snuff (then a fashion accessory associated largely with women), John Gay can be found praising in mock-heroic terms *The Fan* (1717) and Francis Hauksbee "The Patch" (1723), and John Breval and Joseph Thurston consider various possibilities for female grooming in "The Art of Dress" and "The Toilette." Although *The Rape of the Lock* might not overtly seem to be of a party with these works, Pope's poem, especially in its description in Canto I of Belinda's make-up table, cluttered with imported cosmetics and jewelry, the "Unnumber'd Treasures . . . of the World," was in fact seized on by contemporaries as centrally concerned with the new luxury culture. A poem that was clearly influenced by Pope's *Rape*, and also evinces a fascination for the accessories of female adornment, is John Gay's *The Fan*, which contains a description of Venus's grotto where busy Cupids slave to manufacture the various "glitt'ring Implements of Pride":

> Here an unfinish'd *Di'mond Crosslet* lay,
> To which soft Lovers Adoration pay;
> There was the polish'd *Crystal Bottle* seen,
> That with quick Scents revives the modish Spleen:
> Here the yet rude unjointed *Snuff-box* lyes,
> Which serves the railly'd Fop for smart Replies;
> There Piles of *Paper* rose in gilded Reams,
> The future Records of the Lover's Flames;
> Here Clouded *Canes* 'midst heaps of Toys are found,
> And inlaid *Tweezer-Cases* strow the Ground.
> There stands the *Toilette*, Nursery of Charms,

Compleatly furnish'd with bright Beauty's Arms;
The Patch, the Powder-Box, Pulville, Perfumes,
Pins, Paint, a flattr'ing Glass, and Black-lead Combs.
(i. 117–30)

The story told by Gay's poem concerns Strephon, who has been smitten by Corinna's charms but finds his tenderness for her unreciprocated. In desperation he applies to Venus, asking her to supply him with a "bright Toy" that "can charm her Sight." Venus takes pity on his plight and instructs her team of "busie *Cupids*" to fashion a decorated fan. Their employment in this task necessitates the convening of a counsel of the gods to ponder the exact nature of the decoration, an assignment eventually undertaken by Minerva. At length the design is finished and the toy delivered to Strephon and presented by him to Corinna, who promptly capitulates to its attractions. The poem accordingly amounts to a sort of consumerist myth, in which a hard female heart is softened by the shimmer of a fashionable artefact (Nokes 1995).

Blackmore and Philips

Heroi-comical poems, then, are ones that may or may not carry the actual term "heroi-comical" in their title, that achieve a specialized mock-heroic irony by talking in inflated terms about a trivial subject, that sometimes contain a mythological account of the genesis of an object or practice, and that engage with the rise of luxury as a phenomenon of the new consumer society. Among other categories of mock-heroic poem there is one other that I want to single out here; one that could be described in two distinct ways. It is constituted by works parodying Milton's epic style or, to put it another way, that poke fun at the arch-practitioner of English epic, Sir Richard Blackmore. Blackmore, because of his cantankerousness as well as the doubtful quality of his poems, became a figure of abuse in Augustan literary London (Solomon 1980). He had been at loggerheads with Dryden before falling into enmity with the great poet of the immediately following era, Pope: in fact, the very nature of his literary vocation could not help but rile the purists. Blackmore was a career physician who boasted openly of having dashed off his several epic poems while taking coach trips around London visiting patients. This sacrilegious disregard for the venerability of epic gave Blackmore's enemies every provocation to damn his poetry, and this they did in a united hoot of derision. What was seen as wrong with Blackmore's poems was their overstraining for the sublime: they were noisily sonorous but bereft of the largeness of conception on which the true sublime depended.

Blackmore seemed to his contemporaries to epitomize how an epic poem could go wrong, and this perception was to prove a gift for mock-heroic poets. For to do ill by epic was inevitably to do well by mock-epic, and accordingly one understanding of how to produce mock-heroic works was simply to ape the discredited epic manner of Blackmore (Terry 2005). The earliest poem to do this is John Philips's influential

The Splendid Shilling (1701), which tells in inflated Miltonics the story of a starveling poet, living in a draughty garret and pursued by creditors. However, as well as parodying Milton's grand style, and indeed instituting a poetic vogue for doing this, Philips's poem is an exercise in exactly that kind of verbal afflatus that Dryden and others had identified as the hallmark of Blackmore's own style. Take these bravura lines from the final verse paragraph, in which the poet complains about a hole in his trousers (or "galligaskins"):

> Afflictions Great! yet Greater still remain:
> My *Galligaskins* that have long withstood
> The Winter's Fury, and Encroaching Frosts,
> By Time subdu'd, (what will not Time subdue!)
> An horrid Chasm disclose, with Orifice
> Wide, Discontinuous; at which the Winds
> *Eurus* and *Auster*, and the dreadful Force
> Of *Boreas*, that congeals the *Cronian* Waves,
> Tumultuous enter with dire chilling Blasts,
> Portending Agues.
> (ll. 120–9)

These lines mimic the drum-roll of Miltonic style but also the clanking sonorousness so closely identified with Blackmore. Although the imagery of winter storms aims at sublimity, modeled on the "vast, immeasurable gulf" of Milton's sublime chaos, Philips applies it to the pettiness of the poet's gashed trousers. The comedy lies in the fact that the sublime idiom is so overcooked as to turn into fustian, and is then applied to a subject so trifling as to constitute an outright affront to the idea of sublimity. Accordingly, the poem epitomizes a literary pitfall that critics like Dennis had expressly warned against: that of generating an epic "sound" without having the epic conceptions necessary to justify it. Literary historians have made a great deal of Philips's role as the pioneer of one distinct kind of mock-heroic (Bond 1932), but no less important to the development of the genre is Blackmore, whose failed epics provided a blueprint for mock-epic practitioners.

The Decline of Mock-Heroic

So far I have given the impression that mock-heroic thrives only as confined to self-standing poems, such as Philips's *Splendid Shilling* and Pope's *Rape*. However, one aspect of mock-heroic's advancement over the course of the eighteenth century is that it diffuses itself as a transient element within longer, non-burlesque works. Two such are the miscellaneous poems written by James Thomson and William Cowper, *The Seasons* (1730) and *The Task* (1785), both of which contain mock-heroic set-pieces. Moreover, the trend is not confined to poetry: Henry Fielding's novels, for example, delight in drawing mock-heroic parallels between the worlds of classical epic

and insalubrious modern reality (Rawson 1972). Take the following example from *Joseph Andrews*, where Fielding deploys an extended Homeric simile to introduce Mrs. Slipslop's attempted seduction of Joseph:

> As when a hungry Tygress, who long had traversed the Woods in fruitless search, sees within the Reach of her Claws a Lamb, she prepares to leap on her Prey; or as a voracious Pike, of immense Size, surveys through the liquid Element a Roach or Gudgeon which cannot escape her Jaws, opens them wide to swallow the little Fish: so did Mrs. *Slipslop* prepare to lay her violent amorous Hands on the poor *Joseph* . . .

When we see mock-heroic figuring in this way, we can register it as both a victory and a defeat for the genre: on the one hand, we see mock-heroic asserting its relevance to a new literary form, the novel, which had no classical roots and which to some degree defined itself against the classical; on the other, the conditions under which mock-heroic makes an appearance here might be seen as gestural and trivializing. Mock-heroic is perhaps the iconic literary genre of the English Augustan era, a period that we can roughly define as from the Restoration (1660) to the death of Pope (1744). During this period, it enjoys prominence despite being a côterie genre: what we customarily see as the great incarnations of the form, Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*, Garth's *The Dispensary*, and Pope's *Rape* and *The Dunciad*, are few in number and linked by strong ties of influence. It is an august company that mimics the tight-knit brotherhood of the great epics themselves: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Influential recent commentators have seen the period of mock-heroic's flourishing as one of cultural malaise, in which educated people, while remaining reverential toward the grandeurs of the past, have begun to doubt the continuing relevance of those illustrious past times to a tarnished modern reality (Rawson 1972). Mock-heroic, a genre that calls on classical models while expressing satiric views about modern society, posed itself as a uniquely appropriate form in which to speak about this cultural unease.

The last of the great Augustan mock-epics is Pope's *The Dunciad*, which appeared in three books in 1728, with an apparatus of satiric notes in 1729, and in a revised four-book version in 1743. In its final version, the poem tells the story of the coronation of Colley Cibber as the King of Dulness. The event is marked by a festivity involving viciously satiric (and very rude) games, after which Cibber is transported to the Elysian shades to receive a vision of the triumph of Dulness. The fourth book of the poem describes the fulfillment of these prophecies, with the death of science, education, and culture under the universal reign of Chaos:

> Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS! is restor'd;
> Light dies before thy uncreating word:
> Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
> And Universal Darkness buries All.
>
> (iv. 653–6)

The Dunciad provides me with a good point on which to finish, for the apocalyptic end that it trumpets is to some degree the end of mock-heroic itself – the death of precisely the kind of classically influenced culture in which mock-heroic could seem an appropriate language to detail society's ills. Once the virtues of classical society and classical precedents are no longer to be taken for granted, the irony that is generated by counterpointing the classical and the modern, as in mock-heroic works, becomes less sharp-edged and more problematic. Mock-heroic works carry on being produced throughout the rest of the century, and the idea of an ironic paralleling of the classical and modern can be found in influential modern works like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). However, after the death of Pope, mock-heroic never again stands so close to the heart of a literary culture's sense of self-identity.

See also chs. 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"; 11, "Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* and 'Eloisa to Abelard'"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 25, "Rhyming Couplets and Blank Verse"; 27, "Verse Satire"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics"; 33, "The Classical Inheritance"; 37, "The Sublime."

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27

Verse Satire

Brean Hammond

The Nature and Development of Satire

Satire is the art of holding up to ridicule an individual, or an institution (such as the Church or the government), or a more abstract entity such as "humankind." Early English verse satirists, for example Thomas Lodge, John Marston, and Joseph Hall, writing at the close of the sixteenth century, were not receptive to the idea that satire was an art. Satire's muse, they considered, was a "snarling" muse, fueled by anger and indignation. The satirist's vocation was to pinpoint abuses, identifying immoral individuals and corrupt institutions, and to speak out about them as plainly as possible. Satire is "telling it like it is." Sophisticated rhetorical devices that might transform raw indignation into a verbal art, the play of witty intelligence over a subject, could only obstruct the expression of direct criticism. It is unsurprising that the work of Marston and Hall attracted the notice of the censors, and that it was burnt by the public hangman.

Several factors operated to change this way of regarding satire, perhaps the most important of which was the increasing frequency, throughout the seventeenth century, of translations of the Roman satirists Horace, Persius, Juvenal, and Martial. After the Restoration of 1660, significant versions of some or all of the poems of Horace were published by Alexander Brome, Abraham Cowley, John Wilmot (the Earl of Rochester), John Oldham, Thomas Creech, Alexander Pope, Philip Francis, William Cowper, and Christopher Smart. Persius was translated, notably, by John Dryden and William Gifford. Juvenal was translated in full first by Robert Stapleton in 1647, who revised his text in 1660; thereafter poets returned again and again to selections of Juvenal's satires, with very important versions being produced by Henry Vaughan, John Oldham, Henry Higden, John Dryden, and Samuel Johnson.

Undertaking translations of the Roman satirists taught English poets more about satire than anything else could have done. Translating Horace or Juvenal into English, poets immediately encountered the problem of determining the "spirit" or tone in

which the satirist expresses his critique of contemporary Roman society. To compare Horace to Juvenal was at once to perceive the contrast between a good-natured, subtle, ironic, self-deprecating voice and an outrageous, scurrilous, almost pathologically embittered one. At once, then, this suggests to the translator a possible spectrum of positions between hysteria and mild amusement that the satirist can adopt; and it proposes a relationship between the satirist's "true self" and a projected "persona" created for the expression of social critique. Further, it becomes clear that satire is a literary form deeply embedded in contemporary life. Allusive, personal, frequently obscure, Roman satire cannot be translated directly into English that displays similar qualities. Hence the rise of an art called "imitation" – halfway between translation and original composition, as John Dryden described it – the trick of which was to adapt Roman satire to contemporary English mores. Alexander Pope's *Imitations of Horace*, published in the 1730s, were to be the greatest achievements of this hybrid art form, providing a considerable impetus for the development of vernacular English satire and for the elevation of satire into a respectable genre.

There were other, extra-literary factors that created the conditions for the flourishing of satire after 1660. The Restoration of King Charles II in that year ushered in a Frenchified high society that prided itself on its permissiveness. A society on the change, England after 1660 was defined in large part by the cultural memory of a decade of civil war, religious intolerance, and the subsequent experiments in republican social organization. Charles II was more conscious than any previous monarch of the importance of making concessions to public opinion. Presiding over a skeptical, scientific kingdom increasingly devoting itself to trade and commerce, he had often to work through negotiation and compromise. He was an "easy" monarch, whose venereal behavior with his many mistresses made it impossible for him to take the moral high ground, attracting comment in the public theater and in privately circulated manuscript verse. Côteries of aristocratic wits measured their virility by the degree of outspokenness they could risk on political and sexual matters – an enterprise pushed as far as it would go by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. John Dryden, on the other hand, had a civilizing mission for art, satire included. Dryden's stated aims were to refine the English language and to make witty court conversation the gold standard for literary expression. Satire could develop as the kind of art form that Dryden wished it to be in large part because the King was prepared to tolerate it as an acceptable pressure-valve. Satirical freedom of speech was part of a developing culture of commentary, disseminated in coffee-houses and clubs, in theaters and in public prints. It is no accident, therefore, that one of the central features of verse satire developed in the years from the 1660s to the 1680s: the character portrait. Individuals from the King downwards were singled out for ridicule, though in the verse satires of talented writers like Marvell and Dryden the objective of individual character portraits could be to get behind the individual to some general feature of contemporary living – and even to flatter the pilloried individual by a degree of witty distortion that the victim could enjoy. Late on in his career, in 1692, Dryden translated the great Roman satires of Juvenal and Persius, and the preface he wrote for this, the *Discourse concerning the*

Original and Progress of Satire, provides the most memorable image of the satirist's art to be found anywhere in the theoretical writing of the period:

> How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms . . . there is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man, and the fineness of stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place.

It came to be understood in the later seventeenth century that the etymology of the word "satire" was *not* the Greek *saturos*, the mythological wood-demon or satyr who was the half-human and half-bestial companion of the god Bacchus (the word being later applied to the chorus of satyrs in Greek drama who were supposed to speak "satirically"), but rather the Latin adjective *satira* or *satura*, which qualified "lanx" meaning "plate" or "full dish" or medley of food composed of different ingredients. Satire was not, therefore, a rough form of goatish, libidinous exclamation (as sixteenth-century practitioners had thought); rather it was a varied, digressive mixture of different humorous ingredients as developed by Dryden and the writers of King Charles's court.

The political environment of both the Restoration and the subsequent "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 which placed William of Orange on the throne stimulated greater freedom of speech. The bitter factional warfare during the last years of Stuart rule, between those who insisted that a rightful monarch could not be deposed and those who considered that he could if he failed to observe the fundamental terms of the English constitution, would later develop into what came to be recognized as legitimate political parties. The rise of party politics generated vast amounts of satirical writing, driven initially by the desire to destroy one's political opponents, then later merely by the wish to render them absurd as society grew more tolerant and began to understand the importance of institutionalized parliamentary opposition. [*See* ch. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"]. In the absence of other sources of news, public events were commented upon in satirical broadsheets hawked about the streets or provided in coffee-houses. Manuscript poems were eagerly collected and bound into volumes. A modern seven-volume edition of such material is available under the title *Poems on Affairs of State*; and a brief glance at this monumental work shows how the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis of 1677–81, the trial and death of the Earl of Shaftesbury, Monmouth's rebellion, the trial of the Seven Bishops, the birth of James II's son, the Williamite wars, and the Act of Union between England and Scotland – indeed, all the salient political events of the period 1680–1710 – gave rise to poems, prose treatises, and pamphlets.

But William III was a monarch of a very different stamp from his Stuart predecessors, and the reign of William and Mary was characterized by a moral crusade, a "clean up the streets" campaign that, while its main target was satire as expressed in the theater, sowed the seeds of a developing anti-satirical manifesto that would gain

ground as the eighteenth century progressed. When in 1695 the Licensing Act was permitted to lapse, and when in the early years of the eighteenth century a copyright act was passed that for the first time protected literary property, a very considerable impetus was given to the emerging literary and journalistic professions; and those men and women of the "middling sort" who came to regard writing for a living as a possible and legitimate career aspiration did not usually find satire a congenial mode of expression. Writers of a predominantly Whiggish persuasion such as Daniel Defoe (who could be devastatingly satirical on occasion), Richard Blackmore, Richard Steele, Joseph Addison, John Dennis, and Nicholas Rowe, on the whole distrusted wit and satire. It was not kind, it was not humane, it was ungenerous; it was elitist because it relied on there being people who were its victims or who did not get the joke. Satire depends on the creation of a bond between author and reader *against* some third party. In their influential periodicals *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, Addison and Steele opposed the indiscriminate deployment of wit and downgraded satire as an artistic form of expression. They sponsored "sublime," awe-inspiring writing that, whatever its worthwhile qualities, certainly did not exhibit a sense of humor. The growing influence of benevolist psychologies based on sympathy, on the belief that the existential gap between one isolated human being and another could be overcome by exposing oneself to feel what the other feels, generated anti-satirical manifestos. What would later come to be called the cult of sensibility, with "sentiment" or feeling as one of its central terms, privileged sincerity and benevolence as valuable attributes of the individual. Those were not the attributes that characterized satirists. Even more than men, women, who might have had aspirations toward developing a satirical voice in poetry, were caught by this changing taste almost before they got off the blocks. Women did write occasional satire – the second section of this essay will show that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu could use it to devastating effect and that other female poets developed quiet, autobiographical, and self-scrutinizing satiric cadences – but the moves that satire required a writer to make were entirely inimical to the developing ideologies of femininity and sentimentality. Women were not supposed to laugh at their fellow creatures or to have opinions strong enough to lead them into ridiculing institutions or concepts. {*See* chs. 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics."}

The window of opportunity for verse satire that opened in the Restoration period turned out, therefore, to be relatively short-lived. Although the first half of the eighteenth century is often regarded as the "golden age" of verse satire, it was always inoculated with its own antidote, so to speak, and the great satiric achievements of Matthew Prior, John Gay, Alexander Pope, and Jonathan Swift were accomplished to a considerable extent against the grain of developing taste. Satire is an art of public involvement. It depends on being outspoken about abuses, corruptions, crimes, and deviations from the moral law. At its best, satire depends on a quasi-utopian impulse to analyze what is wrong in society, and to imply that the ridicule of those wrongs is the first step toward reform. Far more an urban than a rural form, satire depends for its detail on intimate knowledge of cliques, clubs, associations, allegiances, slang,

trade-talk, gossip. All of the above-listed features are epitomized in the career of Alexander Pope (1688–1744).

Alexander Pope

On first consideration, Pope seems more likely to be a victim of satire than a perpetrator of it. Disabled and deformed by a tubercular condition contracted in early childhood that left him less than a meter and a half tall; a Roman Catholic at a time when Protestantism established its ascendancy, and therefore unable to enjoy a university education or to own property; unmarried and childless – Pope does not seem well equipped for the business of ridiculing, dissecting, and exposing others. The fascination of Pope's career is the way in which he turned weakness into strength, marginality into centrality. To be effective – to distinguish itself from lampoon or name-calling or mere insult – satire had to be accurate and ethical. Such a view of satire was the one that Pope developed, over the whole length of his career. Crucial to this enterprise was the development of an entirely distinctive poetic voice, an instantly recognizable, unmistakable personality, the keynote of which was *independence*. Constructing himself as an outsider, uninterested in power or patronage, a non-metropolitan figure who, retiring to his suburban fastness in Twickenham, could view with detachment the follies of Court, city, and government – a creative artist who, like Oscar Wilde, had nothing to declare but his genius – Pope persuaded his readers that he stood outside all the interest groups that polarized his society. In no one's pocket, owing allegiance to no potentate or party, he made his own unimpeachable life underwrite the ethical truth of his writing.

Mythologizing the self goes hand-in-hand with making myths out of others, as Pope did with both his enemies and his friends. Over the years, Pope's satire created a gallery of heroes and villains, the proper names that peppered his verse not just pointing at living individuals – particular men and women – but coming to stand as symbols for timeless qualities of good and evil, virtue and vice. In the various versions of *The Dunciad* published between 1728 and 1743, Pope created the "Grub Street" myth. He isolates a phenomenon called "Dulness" presided over by a goddess bearing that name, and embodied in individuals called "Dunces." They have a collective identity somewhere between a political party, an academic college, and the laborers in a factory for the manufacture of bad writing. They live in identifiable, generally shady and poor, parts of London; but just as the action of the Homeric epics dramatizes a move westward from Troy to the foundation of Rome, and just as the barbaric tribes of the dark ages later moved from east to west to sack Rome and end civilization, so the Dunces are always going west. Overcrowding their allotted spaces, they threaten to overrun the polite areas of London where Court and government have their seats. Behind this mythology is a metaphysical scheme, part pagan and part Judeo-Christian, in which civilization is perpetually threatened by the goddess Dulness's desire to restore the empire of primal stupidity and mental anarchy over which she

once reigned. The dunces' activities in sapping morale and undermining intellectual endeavor are tools in this project of inverted Restoration. As in the earlier *Rape of the Lock*, Pope crams into the narrow compass of three books all the main incidents that one expects from an epic.

In the 1730s, in a series of poems very loosely based on earlier poems by Horace, though punctuated by original works such as the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, Pope created himself as the cultural arm of the political opposition to Sir Robert Walpole and his governing clique of Court Whigs. Part of the attack was to be found in the *Dunciad*'s analysis of intellectual degeneration, outlined above. Responsibility for this was located in Walpole's patronage of hack writers to give a journalistic respectability to his political manifestos. England was in the grip of moral corruption, beyond the capability of Parliament, the courts, or the Church to stem. Only the exemplary life of the fearless satirist, Pope repeatedly argued, could stand in the way of this ethical decline. Reviving the art of the satirical portrait as practiced by Dryden, Pope created memorable pictures of Joseph Addison (Atticus), George Bubb Dodington (Bufo), and John, Lord Hervey (Sporus), in *Arbuthnot*, and in the *Imitations* a host of more general portraits that skewered an entire caste of politicians and Court favorites, not stopping short of King George II and Queen Caroline themselves. Year upon year, Pope produced "state of the nation" poems in which his own indomitable, ungaggable voice rings out, as it were from a soapbox in the public square.

By the middle of the eighteenth century there was a turning away from this kind of writing. The most explicit statement of a new *Zeitgeist* occurs in the work of Joseph and Thomas Warton, the former writing in the introduction to his *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746) of a need to eschew didactic subjects for poetry and to turn away from wit [*see* ch. 34, "AUGUSTANISM AND PRE-ROMANTICISM"]. Joseph Warton's biography of Pope (first volume published 1756) picks up on a growing climate of opposition to and downgrading of Pope that is expressed, for example, in Edward Young's influential series of poems composed in the 1740s, *Night Thoughts*, and in his later *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759). Young's *Conjectures* were heavily influenced by the novelist Samuel Richardson, who – like Warton – took the view that Pope lacked all imagination and was a second-rate poet. Perhaps the most central poet of the mid-eighteenth century, Thomas Gray, is notable precisely because he rejects a poetry of public statement, finding significance in rural retreat, obscurity, and the labyrinthine complications of the inner self [*see* ch. 20, "THOMAS GRAY, *ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCH YARD*"].

A striking example of culture on the change is offered by the two major "imitations" in the satiric mode composed by Samuel Johnson. Whereas his *London*, composed in 1738 in imitation of Juvenal's Third Satire, illustrates all the aspects of metropolitan political satire that we have described above, when he came to write *The Vanity of Human Wishes* a decade later (1749), he had lost faith in the bristling certainties of such a poetic voice. Written in imitation of Juvenal's Tenth Satire, *The Vanity of Human Wishes* has to transform Juvenal's Stoic message of *mens sana in corpore sano* ("a healthy mind in a healthy body") into something far more explicitly

Christian. The reader is exhorted, despite all the evidence of disappointment, sadness, and downright evil that the poem has catalogued, to pray – to "raise for Good the supplicating Voice" (l. 351). There is no guarantee, however, that any deity is listening: and Johnson's poem ends in an uncertainty far closer to tragedy than to satire [*see* ch. 18, "SAMUEL JOHNSON, *LONDON* AND *THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES*"].

In the latter half of the century, the most prominent satirical voice – in the sense that his *œuvre* is dominated by verse satire – belongs to the poet Charles Churchill, whose short-lived career spanned the years 1761–5, and whose work (to which I shall return later in this essay) seems like a throwback to an earlier generation. Satire could certainly still colonize passages of longer poems, as it always had. A denunciatory voice rings out very many times in John Milton's poetic *œuvre* regardless of whether the prevailing genre is epic, as in the case of *Paradise Lost*, or pastoral elegy, as in *Lycidas*. In imitation of Milton, an angry voice of complaint is found in eighteenth-century modes as diverse as georgic, pastoral, and Pindaric ode – such as happens in Thomas Gray's "The Bard" when the narrator excoriates the colonizing activities of King Edward I in Wales. Some of the period's greatest long poems, such as James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730), had broken out in a satiric rash from time to time – as happens in "Autumn," when in a lengthy excursus the poet hits out at rural sports, the passage culminating in an orgiastic scene of mind-numbing drunkenness:

Confused above,
Glasses and bottles, pipes and gazetteers,
As if the table e'en itself was drunk,
Lie a wet broken scene; and wide, below,
Is heap'd the social slaughter: where astride
The lubber Power in filthy triumph sits,
Slumbrous, inclining still from side to side,
And steeps them drench'd in potent sleep till morn.
(ll. 557–64)

William Cowper's loosely associative poem *The Task* (1785) is based on an ideal of casual conversation very far from the polished elegance of Drydenian couplets; but in the opening of Book II it rises to an impassioned complaint against the slave trade and a defense of what the poet takes to be the quintessentially English virtue of liberty:

I would not have a slave to till my ground,
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews bought and sold have ever earn'd.
No: dear as freedom is, and in my heart's
Just estimation prized above all price,
I had much rather be myself the slave
And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him.
(ii. 29–36)

"Complaint" is perhaps a more useful term than satire to describe such departures from the prevailing tonality of long poems; and we can use it, too, to characterize a number of poems, many by women, that voice a deep unhappiness with the prevailing conditions of living. Mary Collier's heated response to Stephen Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* (1730), in which Duck had seemed to betray class solidarity by singling out women agricultural laborers as lazy gossips "Prepar'd, whil'st he [Our Master] is here, to make his Hay; / Or, if he turns his Back, prepar'd to play" (ll. 165–6), is precisely a "complaint." *The Woman's Labour* (1739) is not exactly a satire under our definition: it is the washerwoman's counter-claim that the nature of her labor is a durance every bit as hard as farm work. Collier and Duck are significant, however, in that they might support a hypothesis that the genuine satiric voices to be heard in the eighteenth century, after Churchill, are those of marginal and marginalized figures [*see* ch. 15, "Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, and Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*"]. At a time when Cowper could produce the line "God made the country, and man made the town" (i. 749) as the peak of the crescendo to Book I of *The Task*, it seems that the polarities of town and country have been reversed and that satire might come from those, like Mary Leapor, Burns, Crabbe, and Blake, whose sympathies are with the common man, especially the downtrodden agricultural poor. The next section of this essay will investigate the poetic achievement of the period's verse satire in a little more detail by way of a brief survey of some satirical poems (excluding those by Pope), most of which appear in the second edition of David Fairer's and Christine Gerrard's *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (2004).

Verse Satires 1700–1800: A Brief Commentary

One of the most powerful weapons in the satirist's arsenal is parody. Literary parody involves imitating the characteristic features, stylistic and other, of another work and turning those to ludicrous effect, often by applying them to a ridiculously inappropriate subject. Some of the most successful satires in the period are parodies, or involve parodic techniques. John Philips's *The Splendid Shilling* (1705) is a near-miss as far as the genre of satire is concerned: this autobiographical poem describing the misery of the penurious poet who lacks "a *Splendid Shilling*" creates too much sympathy for the speaker. Cleverly applying Miltonic inverted syntax and classical proper names to a world otherwise dominated by hunger and bailiffs – concerns as far away as possible from those of the Miltonic epic, where the fate of mankind hangs in the balance – the poem sets up some amusing local textures; but they cannot survive the sadness of lines such as these:

So pass my Days. But when Nocturnal Shades
This world invelop, and th'inclement Air
Persuades Men to repel benumming Frosts,
With pleasant Wines, and crackling blaze of Wood;

Me Lonely sitting, nor the glimmering Light
Of Make-weight Candle, nor the joyous Talk
Of loving Friend delights; distress'd, forlorn,
Amidst the horrors of the tedious Night,
Darkling I sigh . . .
(ll. 93–101)

Including the self within the purview of the social critique or the satirical complaint entirely alters the prevailing tonality of the poem. To be effective, the satirist has to retain objectivity or invisibility, commenting from a position offstage to the visual drama.

Far more successful among parodic satires is John Gay's *The Shepherd's Week* (1714), a series of mock-pastorals written in imitation of Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* but more directly mocking a set of pastoral poems produced in 1709 by Ambrose Philips. Pastoral was a genre coming under serious scrutiny in the early eighteenth century. Samuel Johnson's dismissal of it in his *Life of Milton* (1779), where he condemns *Lycidas* for its author's repugnantly conventional pretense that he and the dead poet whom he salutes in the elegy (Edward King) were shepherds tending their flocks on rural hillsides, sounded the death-knell for that poetic form. Earlier in the century, the question of whether there was any life left in a form that went back to the Greek poet Theocritus, working in the early third century BCE, was a more open one. Pope's attack on Philips's pastorals in *The Guardian*, no. 40, was aimed not at the genre itself (Pope wrote pastorals based around the four seasons) but at the infantilizing tendency of Philips's simple diction and the idiot rusticity of the names and manners of his characters. Gay's *The Shepherd's Week* parodies those features of Philips's style. In "Friday; or, the Dirge," two swains with the unlikely names of Bumkinet and Grubbinol lament the demise of the much-loved Blouzelind:

Where-e'er I gad, I *Blouzelind* shall view,
Woods, Dairy, Barn and Mows our Passion knew.
When I direct my Eyes to yonder Wood,
Fresh rising Sorrow curdles in my Blood.
Thither I've often been the Damsel's Guide,
When rotten Sticks our Fuel have supply'd;
There, I remember how her Faggots large,
Were frequently these happy Shoulders charge.
Sometimes this Crook drew Hazel Boughs adown,
And stuff'd her Apron wide with Nuts so brown.
(ll. 41–50)

Blouzelind (the name has overtones of "blousy," busty) has, it seems, indulged her passions all over the place. The verb "curdles" seems to liken Bumkinet's sorrow to a kind of cheese-making. The final four lines are crammed with sexual *double entendres*: "Faggots large" coupled with the name "Blouzelind" transfers the epithet "large" to

her anatomical features rather than her firewood. Stuffing her apron with nuts, in context, takes on a seaside postcard jocularity. Overall, the solemn mourning for the dead shepherd/poet that is a convention of pastoral elegy is undermined by the latent sexuality, and the rustic characters, seen from the perspective of the knowing city poet, are incapable of having genuinely elegiac feelings. As is very often the case in satiric poetry, the satirist wins a victory through his superior intelligence and wit, even if he is not necessarily in the right. [*See* ch. 10, "John Gay, *The Shepherd's Week*."] Rustic pastoral may have been played out in England, but in Scotland it was going to combine with a genuine Scots vernacular to create newly energetic poetic forms, as is obvious in Allan Ramsay's "The Gentle Shepherd" (1726). Pope's polite pastorals, despite Gay's support, were not actually the way forward.

The other great verse satirist to engage in parody was Jonathan Swift, and he has in common with John Gay the deployment of highly unstable parodic forms – so unstable, indeed, that the reader is sometimes left uncertain what exactly is being mocked, and from what point of view. At variance with the standard metrical practice of the period's verse satire, which is to use rhyming iambic pentameter couplets, Swift deployed a less formal octosyllabic line. Yet the fast-moving ease of this meter can lull the reader into a false sense of security. Some of Swift's notoriety resulted from a poem called "The Lady's Dressing Room," published in 1732, and the set of poems he published in 1734 concerning, broadly, the relationship between sexuality and hygiene: poems the subject matter of which offends public decency and penetrates taboo areas where most readers feel acutely uncomfortable. In "The Lady's Dressing Room," Swift provides an exaggerated catalog of all the repulsive features of a woman's boudoir, as discovered by her young and immature lover. Forced by some mysterious compulsion to leave nothing unturned, Strephon is punished by having his image-repertoire poisoned to the extent that, whenever afterwards he thinks of a woman, he cannot dissociate her from the base physicality that he has discovered. At one level, the poem is a parody of the "courtly love" or Platonic tradition of writing about women that had its latest efflorescence in some of the Elizabethan sonneteers. The exaltation of women, so that young men are encouraged to experience them idealistically and falsely as goddesses, is somewhere behind the satire. Yet Swift supplies a "moral" to this poem that, while it is presented as a normative perspective – the view of any rational man – is actually difficult to swallow:

> If *Strephon* would but stop his Nose;
> (Who now so impiously blasphemes
> Her Ointments, Daubs, and Paints and Creams,
> Her Washes, Slops, and every Clout,
> With which he makes so foul a Rout;)
> He soon would learn to think like me,
> And bless his ravisht Sight to see
> Such Order from Confusion sprung,
> Such gaudy Tulips rais'd from Dung.
>
> (ll. 157–65)

Strephon stopping his nose reminds us uncomfortably of the insane Gulliver stopping his nose with rue to eliminate the odor of humanity at the close of *Gulliver's Travels*. His sight would need to be "ravisht" to appreciate the transformation of Celia; and the force of the adjective "gaudy" is hardly positive.

"A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" commences with mock-pastoral. Corinna, a whore "For whom no Shepherd sighs in vain" (the implication being that no shepherd sighs at all; and that no one need sigh who has the price of her body), ascends to her "Bow'r" (read "garret") and proceeds to offer the voyeuristic reader a bizarre strip-show. More than undressing, however (or less), Corinna begins actually to take herself to pieces, removing all the prostheses that create her semblance of beauty. It is as if a woman were reducible to a set of artificial bits and pieces, having no soul, no inner life at all, being just the sum of her unnatural parts. As such, the poem seems to be an uneasy satire on cosmetics – a very old misogynist theme. Yet the poem does begin to recruit sympathy, perhaps despite itself, for the psychological traumas Corinna undergoes. If the reader has been smiling uneasily at the "cabaret," s/he ceases to do so when it becomes apparent that Corinna cannot escape the harsh reality of her social circumstances even in her dreams. The final stanza speaks to the difficulty of reassembling the fragmented self, of facing the day; and its inclusion of the poet in the first person suggests involvement of a kind that has been absent before:

> The Nymph, tho' in this mangled Plight,
> Must ev'ry Morn her Limbs unite.
> But how shall I describe her Arts
> To recollect the scatter'd Parts?
> Or shew the Anguish, Toil, and Pain,
> Of gath'ring up herself again?
> The bashful Muse will never bear
> In such a Scene to interfere.
> *Corinna* in the Morning dizen'd,
> Who sees, will spew; who smells, be poison'd.
> (ll. 65–74)

The final line compounds the poem's overall uncertainty of tone. Having created a sense of Corinna's psychological inner being, and having seemed to sympathize with her miserable plight, it throws up its hands and reverts to a cruelly mocking, truly satirical tone. Swift manifests here an ambivalence toward prostitution that was a feature of his era: are prostitutes victims, or predators? In novelistic treatments of the later century, whores are increasingly to be represented as women ruined by men and refused a fair chance thereafter; in Swift's time and in his poem, they could still be perceived as sirens who lure men to their ruin.

Swift was just as ambivalent, however, when writing about *himself* in *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift, D.S.P.D.* (1739). Taking his cue from the idea that in German is called *Schadenfreude* – our tendency to derive a perverse and guilty pleasure from the misfortunes even of our closest friends (and how typical of Swift to face up to this) –

the poet imagines his own last illness and demise and its reception in the polite world, whose denizens "Then hug themselves, and reason thus; / "It is not yet so bad with us" (ll. 115–16). Swift's female friends "Receive the News in *doleful Dumps*, / 'The Dean is dead, (*and what is Trumps?*)' " (ll. 227–8). The clichéd expression of *doleful Dumps* seems particularly inadequate to represent feeling at a close friend's death, but in any case the card game is more important. Even his closest friends, it seems, cannot sustain their mourning or his memory for a decent interval of time. This is mordantly ironic enough, but the poem then takes an unexpected turn. Cutting to the Rose Tavern, where a group has assembled, Swift invents an "indiff'rent," supposedly objective observer to provide an "impartial" account of his character. Character portraits in satirical poems are normally not flattering. This one, however, is almost entirely flattering, and Swift could hardly have done better if he had written it himself (which, of course, he did!). Lines such as the resounding "Fair LIBERTY was all his Cry" (l. 347) seem to be entirely sincere, non-ironic tributes to Swift's achievements as an Irish patriot who liberated Ireland from certain kinds of colonial pressure applied by England. Yet there are also some subversive undercurrents. Discussing Swift's literary work, the impartial observer absolves him from accusations of plagiarism: "To steal a Hint was never known, / But what he writ was all his own" (ll. 317–18). This couplet is itself, however, *stolen from*, or at least identical to, a couplet earlier written by the poet Waller! Does that irony suggest a more sustained, structural irony throughout the entire poem? Is the imagined eulogy a satire on the genre of funeral eulogizing? Does it glance at his friend Alexander Pope's flattering self-portrait in his verse autobiography *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*? Is it, on the contrary, Swift's attempt to write the history books under cover of a poetic persona? Or his entirely sincere self-evaluation? One way of reading Swift's satire is the so-called "reader entrapment" approach. Readers schooled in this approach will be aware that, if the usual "contract" made between the satirist and the reader is to be in league together against a satirized third party, Swift's writing makes this contract and then fails to honor it, dragging the reader into the position of the victim. In *Verses*, the reader has been enjoying Swift's fictionally posthumous joke against his friends and his society, only to start to suspect that s/he may have been the butt of the joke all along. Swift is an exception to the generalization made earlier in considering John Philips, that autobiographical presence in a poem seems to sabotage the degree of clinical detachment required for successful satire.

Female-authored poems tend to include the self within the scope of the satirical complaint, altering the satiric pitch of the poem. Sarah Fyge Egerton, for example, and Mary Leapor write powerful poems demanding their share of social liberty and speaking out boldly against male oppression, often in startlingly modern terms – "Say Tyrant Custom, why must we obey / The impositions of thy haughty Sway?" (Egerton, "The Emulation," ll. 1–2) – but they do not remain immune from the tyrannies of which they complain. Leapor's "Mira" poems fall into this category. "An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame," for example, is technically a very fine achievement, but in presenting a portrait gallery of types who strive to get above the crowd and be notable,

she self-deprecatingly introduces herself as an offender and the poem modulates into the confessional rather than the satirical: "Ev'n *Mira*'s Self, presuming on the Bays, / Appears among the Candidates for Praise" (ll. 63–4). Leapor, however, achieves a genuinely distinctive voice for female-authored satire in poems that do not try to emulate the strategies of masculine satire. In "Crumble-Hall" (1748), Leapor adopts the conventions of the traditional country-house poem as practiced by Ben Jonson and Alexander Pope, the point of which was to celebrate the lord of the manor as a generous and good landowner living in harmonious balance with the architecture of his house and the management of his estate. "Crumble-Hall" is distinctive in that, based on Leapor's experience in Edgcote House where she was a kitchen-maid, it views the country house from the perspective of one who *cleans*, rather than *owns* it. Rococo wood-carving of the kind created by Grinling Gibbons in great houses such as Burleigh seems very odd indeed when looked at from the servant's-eye view:

> Then step within – there stands a goodly Row
> Of oaken Pillars – where a gallant Show
> Of mimic Pears and carv'd Pomgranates twine,
> With the plump Clusters of the spreading Vine
> . . .
> The Roof – no *Cyclops* e'er could reach so high:
> Not *Polypheme*, tho' form'd for dreadful Harms,
> The Top could measure with extended Arms.
> Here the pleas'd Spider plants her peaceful Loom:
> Here weaves secure, nor dreads the hated Broom.
> (ll. 35–8, 43–7)

Naturalistic fruit carved out of wood comes to seem simply idiotic in Leapor's skeptical gaze; high ceilings and grand rooms are simply inconvenient places where spiders can be at their ease. Homeric reference to the Cyclops Polyphemus is here rendered amusing by its domestic application. "Crumble-Hall" is a wonderfully quiet satire at the expense of a poetic mode, the country-house poem, that takes itself very seriously indeed. [*See* ch. 16, "MARY LEAPOR, 'CRUMBLE-HALL.' "]

The one woman poet who could consistently beat the men at their own game was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Her *Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace* (1733) breaks all the rules of femininity in attacking Alexander Pope directly, kicking him in all the places that hurt. It is what in the eighteenth century would be called a "particular" satire, directly focused on an identifiable individual. Her trump card is that she derives from an aristocratic social provenance above that of Pope, and could look down upon him in lines like "Hard as thy Heart, and as thy Birth obscure" (l. 20). She shows her knowledge of contemporary debates about the nature of satire, and deploys it in the satire itself:

> *Satire* shou'd, like a polish'd Razor keen,
> Wound with a Touch, that's scarcely felt or seen.

> Thine is an Oyster-Knife, that hacks and hews;
> The Rage, but not the Talent to Abuse;
> And is in *Hate,* what *Love* is in the Stews.
> (ll. 25–9)

Accustomed to think of himself as the most polished satirist of the age, Pope must have writhed on the receiving end of what is itself a very suave performance, suggesting that the great poet's satire is as inept and misplaced as a lover in a brothel. Class elevation is exploited brilliantly again by Lady Mary in her "Epistle from Arthur Gray the Footman, to Mrs. Murray, after his Condemnation for Attempting a Rape" (1747). Lady Mary imagines the last confessional words of Arthur Gray, whose desire for his mistress Griselda Baillie, friend of Lady Mary, got the better of him. He was apprehended, sentenced to death, and eventually transported. Lady Mary ventriloquizes Arthur the footman's plaintive voice, explaining that by contrast to the trifling beaux of the fashionable world, his actions were prompted by genuine love:

> Turn, lovely nymph (for so I wou'd have said)
> Turn from those triflers who make Love a trade
> . . .
> Frequent debauch has pall'd their sickly taste
> . . .
> They sigh not from the heart, but from the brain . . .
> (ll. 43–4, 47, 49)

Enlisting the reader's sympathy for this hopeless longing, Lady Mary nevertheless succeeds in sabotaging it. Her worldly, aristocratic, and cynical elevation shows through the cracks in Arthur's voice, and the ludicrously inappropriate, even slapstick aspects of Arthur's attempt are apparent as, summoned by her bell, he brings his mistress's tea armed with a pistol: "Think when I held the pistol to your breast, / Had I been of the world's large rule possest, / That world had then been yours, and I been blest!" (ll. 97–9). Although this is not straightforwardly classifiable as a satire – it is perhaps a mock Ovidian epistle, where some of the humor resides in the fact that lovers' complaints such as Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" usually featured female voices; or perhaps even an early dramatic monologue, anticipating those of Browning in the nineteenth century – it is an unsettling and memorable poem. [*See* ch. 13, "LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU, *SIX TOWN ECLOGUES* AND OTHER POEMS."]

Charles Churchill's brief active career (1761–5) was in many respects a throwback to that of Alexander Pope. Politically, the 1750s were a relatively soporific decade, as a "Broad-bottom" consensus tried to avoid the direct controversy generated by the split between "outs" and "ins." By the end of the decade, however, there was controversy aplenty as George III assumed the throne in 1760 at the height of the Seven Years War: once again there were popular heroes such as Pitt the Elder and John Wilkes, and villains such as the Prime Minister Bute, who was widely believed to be heading a Scottish conspiracy to take over the corridors of English power.

Charles Churchill's satire is steeped in the poetry of his eminent predecessor Pope, and yet he took every opportunity to distance himself from his mentor. Although not short of targets – *The Rosciad*, for example, functions as a kind of gossip column, satirizing a range of theater practitioners from David Garrick downward – Churchill seems to lack Pope's ethical basis. The commitment to permanently existent, publicly shared values, insisted upon by Pope, is absent from Churchill's *œuvre*. Lacking a secure position from which to speak, Churchill, in poems such as "An Epistle to William Hogarth," mythologizes abstractions like "Prudence" and "Candour" – the latter being the distinguishing quality of Churchill's own work. "Prudence" in Churchill's vocabulary is an ironized label for inauthenticity. In his book, Pope was a "prudent" poet: that is, a hypocrite whose claims to moral probity were bogus. In the terms created by Churchill's poem "Night," Pope was a poet of the "Day," whereas Churchill was a poet of the "Night" – a poet of freedom, outspokenness, and good living. Pope claimed to see a continuity between a virtuous private life and virtuous politics; Churchill severed that bond, making his frankly rakish and sensuous private life the guarantee for his unblemished record of public service. Downwardly mobile compared to Pope's, Churchill's satire looks for its validation not to a group of aristocrats who represent public morals, but to the marketplace, to the book-buying public with whom he was so popular.

A great bear of a man with coarse features (even in physical appearance the antithesis of the finely chiseled Pope), a former Anglican clergyman and an anti-Jacobite, Churchill's opinions and attitudes were in most respects opposed to those of Pope. Nevertheless, he was engaged on a self-conscious mission to restore the satirist to the position of public prominence that Pope's poetry had gained for him. Changes in the nature of politics and of literary taste had, however, already rendered his aspirations redundant. Pope's independent, *ego contra mundum* posture, derived from his sense of speaking for an aristocratic alternative government, was unavailable to Churchill, to whom it was ideologically and temperamentally unsuited. Churchill borrowed many of Pope's poetic forms and alluded to them constantly, but he inhabited his poems in a way that created himself as Pope's anti-type. This new presence, that of the candid, hard-living poet of the night, lacks the Popean power to convince. The diminution of ethical energy ensured that he would, in Byron's terms, "flame the meteor of a day."

After Churchill, verse satire in the sense of poetry written to ridicule or condemn using the devices of humor and wit, poetry unafraid to name names and pillory individuals, was rarely attempted in the eighteenth century. Both Goldsmith in *The Deserted Village* (1770), in which he condemned the enclosure of common land, and Crabbe's *The Village* (1783), reacting against the former's idealization of village life, are fueled by Juvenalian anger:

> Say ye, opprest by some fantastic woes,
> Some jarring nerve that baffles your repose;
> . . .

How would ye bear in real pain to lie,
Despis'd, neglected, left alone to die?
(*The Village*, ll. 252–3, 260–1)

These are serious, even poker-faced, poems, however, and the most complete and successful satire of the later eighteenth century is to be found in the Scottish Lallans dialect reintroduced by Robert Burns. "Holy Willie's Prayer" (1789) satirizes William Fisher, a church elder in the parish of Mauchline, Ayrshire, and an inveterate enemy to the poet on account of his amorous scrapes and his lack of respect for the cloth. Fisher is imagined down on his knees, praying to his God, whom he addresses familiarly as if God were a senior official in the church. Indeed, Fisher remakes God in his own image. Fisher's certainty of his own salvation, deriving from the "auld licht" Calvinism that he has molded to his own advantage, coats him in a smug self-satisfaction. God's intimate knowledge of his soul will surely result in his being forgiven for fornication with a servant lass – "three times – I trow," especially if his being drunk is taken into account. Holy Willie enlists God in his struggles against his parochial tormentors Burns and Gavin Hamilton:

L—d mind Gaun Hamilton's deserts!
He drinks, and swears, and plays at cartes,
Yet has sae mony taking arts
    Wi' Great and Sma',
Frae G-d's ain priest the people's hearts
    He steals awa.—
(ll. 61–6)

The brilliance of this satire lies not only in the exploitation of the stanzaic form (the "Habbie"), nor in the vigor of the dialect, but in the analysis of the relationship between a particular strain of Calvinism and its making of a particular strain of Scots smallmindedness and hypocrisy still with us today.

See also chs. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"; 26, "Epic and Mock-Heroic"; 33, "The Classical Inheritance"; 34, "Augustanism and Pre-Romanticism"; 38, "Poetry and the City."

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28
The Ode

Margaret M. Koehler

A useful illustration of the two broad phases of the ode as a Restoration and eighteenth-century poetic form arises by comparing two odes that call for calm: William Congreve's "Upon a Lady's Singing. Pindarick Ode" (1692) and Joseph Warton's "To Solitude" (1746). Congreve's ode is occasioned by an external event, an arresting vocal performance. Warton, on the other hand, is not moved by a particular event but rather summons an internal state of mind by imagining an unreal scene, detached from distinct time – "at deep dead of night" – and secluded in space – "by the dusky nooks, / And the pensive-falling brooks" (ll. 15–16). Both poets explore their subjects through personification, a literary device increasingly associated with the ode by the middle of the eighteenth century. Interestingly, Congreve's singing lady and his personification of Silence are separate (and aurally opposite), while Warton's personification of Solitude is the addressee and central subject of his ode. Congreve's personified Silence is isolated in a single stanza, one of a broad company of human, heavenly, and allegorical agencies in the poem:

> And lo! Silence himself is here;
> Methinks I see the Midnight God appear,
> In all his downy Pomp aray'd,
>   Behold the rev'rend Shade:
> An ancient Sigh he sits upon,
> Whose Memory of Sound is long since gone,
> And purposely annihilated for his Throne:
> Beneath, two soft transparent Clouds do meet,
> In which he seems to sink his softer Feet.
> A melancholy Thought, condens'd to Air,
>   Stol'n from a Lover in Despair,
> Like a thin Mantle, serves to wrap
> In Fluid Folds his visionary Shape.

A Wreath of Darkness round his Head he wears,
Where curling Mists supply the Want of Hairs.
(ll. 35–49)

Although the apparition of Silence retains a haze of mystery, Congreve details its self-contained components meticulously: a sigh for a throne, a melancholy thought for a mantle, curling mists for hairs. Just as silence is a physical state, Silence is a physically articulated personification. The speaker of the poem does not address Silence or absorb any aspects of the personification; when he finishes the description, Silence disappears to be replaced by "Exstasy of Sound."

Warton, by contrast, addresses Solitude – notably a female personification – and identifies himself as her votary:

Musing maid, to thee I come,
Hating the tradeful city's hum;
O let me calmly dwell with thee,
From noisy mirth and bus'ness free.
(ll. 19–22)

Solitude is thus set against noise and bustle; no singing would be welcome. Solitude is physically embodied, in "robes of flowing black array'd"; importantly, she is abstracted from a dark, secluded *scene*, of which the poet and the reader can become a part. Warton's desire to "dwell with" Solitude foregrounds his identification with the personified state in a way that Congreve does not imagine. Congreve aspires to perfect silence as he listens to the singing, but he wishes to remain a passive though intent viewer:

Stir not a Pulse, and let my Blood,
That turbulent, unruly Flood,
Be softly staid:
Let me be all, but my attention, dead.
(ll. 9–12)

That wish of Congreve's captures how the Restoration ode moves to more intense vision by exalting a compelling external subject – in this case, even the power of another artist beside the poet. This earlier ode aspires to a sacred *attention* to gain access to poetic power. Warton's later ode aspires not to a suspension of all powers except awareness, but instead to poetic vision gained by the power of the poet's imagination. While Congreve's Silence clears the way for a powerful subject – the lady's singing – Warton's Solitude requires the departure of any subject except the poet and the personified power. For Congreve, calm emerges though an erasure of self before a powerful scene (and sound); for Warton, calm arises when the self can enter that powerful scene and be transformed by the self's own imaginative powers. The two odes, written fifty-four years apart, reveal several of the form's central

concerns, notably negotiation of an encounter with some powerful subject and claims to poetic power through movement from an ordinary realm to a sacred realm.

The ode makes an excellent exemplary case among eighteenth-century poetic forms because it embodies tension between a particular poetic kind traceable to the ancients and the eighteenth century's transformation of that kind to suit new directions in poetry. Ancient Greek poets invented the form, ancient Roman poets used it, and British (as well as other European) poets revived it during the Renaissance. The ode attracted eighteenth-century British poets for various and evolving reasons. As inherited from the classical and Renaissance past, the ode was a poem of address honoring some public occasion in a lofty style. The form suited the Restoration and early eighteenth-century propensity for public poetry celebrating political events and heroes. In the hierarchy of poetic genres inherited from the ancients, the ode held a middle position, below epic and tragedy but above comedy, satire, and lesser lyrics. It thus also answered the eighteenth-century desire to write poetry within a pre-existing set of genre categories. But the ode also carried with it a less orderly expectation. Ancient odes had also been used to express wild enthusiasm and poetic inspiration. The form offered eighteenth-century poets what James Sutherland has called "a holiday from the Rules." Poetic genres like the ode did not simply dictate what a poet would produce but allocated places for a wide range of poetic expression and effect. In the terrain of the ode, a poet had license to undergo passionate transport and to move beyond the everyday to some extravagant exaltation of a powerful subject. It was this capacity of the ode that attracted eighteenth-century poets most strongly and that was best able to absorb the new directions poetry took during the period. To trace the distinct phases of the ode during the Restoration and eighteenth century is to discern the period's evolving conception of lyric poetry.

The Restoration Ode

The period's voracious appetite for odes was first whetted in 1656 with Abraham Cowley's publication of his *Pindarique Odes, Written in Imitation of the Stile & Manner of the Odes of Pindar*. The first ode in English had appeared in 1582 in a volume of poetry by Thomas Watson, a friend of Christopher Marlowe's, but the form did not become widespread in England until the seventeenth century. Poets like Ben Jonson, Richard Fanshawe, and Andrew Marvell wrote odes after the looser ancient model of Horace, while John Milton and Richard Crashaw employed the form to religious ends. But Cowley's collection marked a new and infectious enthusiasm for the ode, most notably a turn toward Pindar as a model. Pindar (born *c.*1518 BCE) wrote victory odes – formally intricate sublime songs celebrating the athletic triumphs of Greek heroes. Cowley and his followers admired Pindar's passion, extravagance, abrupt transitions, frequent digressions, and bold metaphors. They applied these techniques to encomiastic odes on royal and military power.

Pindar's elaborate metrical and stanzaic patterns – including a triadic series of stanzas called the strophe, antistrophe, and epode, which reflected dance patterns that were part of the original choric performance of the Greek ode – were a more controversial matter. Cowley strongly advocated irregular imitation of Pindar's spirit and tone rather than strict translation and formal accuracy; his lines, rhymes, and stanzas did not conform to fixed patterns. In his preface to the volume he claimed that Pindar required modernization to be intelligible to a contemporary audience: "If a man should undertake to translate Pindar word for word, it would be thought that one Mad man had translated another." Instead, Cowley saw himself as introducing the "noblest and highest kind of writing in Verse" in an "English habit." His genius was to combine ancient Greek appeal with new ambitions and options for English poetry, celebrating a variety of subjects in odes bearing titles such as "To Mr. Hobs," "The Resurrection," "The Muse," "Brutus," "To the New Year," "The Plagues of Egypt," and "Life."

The extravagance of the Pindaric ode suited a nation glorying in the restoration of its monarch, Charles II, to the throne. As Pindar's victory odes had praised not simply an athletic hero but by extension that hero's family, city, and divine patrons, so too the modern Pindaric paid tribute to a wider community – most often, Britain as a nation – through its profuse praise of a figure who embodied that nation, usually a monarch or military hero. Many Pindarics of the Restoration and early eighteenth century were also *panegyrics* – poems of elaborate praise – of leaders and heroes. The return of Charles II in 1660 was hailed with odes, including one from Cowley himself. Charles's death in 1685 also prompted an imposing tribute: John Dryden's *Threnodia Augustalis. A Funeral-Pindarique*. This 517-line ode grieves protractedly, detailing the illness and death of "Our Atlas." Dryden makes abundantly clear that the fate of Britain hinges upon the fate of her kings:

> For all those Joys thy Restauration brought,
> For all the Miracles it wrought,
> For all the healing Balm thy Mercy pour'd
> Into the Nations bleeding Wound . . .
> For these and more, accept our Pious Praise;
> 'Tis all the Subsidy
> The present Age can raise,
> The rest is charg'd on late Posterity.
> (ll. 292–95, 304–7)

In elegiac tone, Dryden's ode attempts the more practical purpose of assuring his nation that Charles's brother James II – who would be unseated within three years – is the proper successor. The ode compares James II to Hercules (an unlikely analogy for this weak and unpopular ruler), and it closes with a vision of his long, prosperous reign, complete with a conquering British navy: a force that would come to figure prominently in the ode in coming decades.

The loftiness and freedom of the Cowleyan Pindaric attracted many imitators less talented than Dryden. By the early decades of the eighteenth century, incompetent practitioners of the form, using it to curry favor and fortune by exaggerating the merits of undeserving recipients, had virtually discredited it. The "birthday ode," commissioned annually to honor the King, became an oft-cited marker of the panegyric ode's degeneration during the first half of the eighteenth century. Discerning the early evidence of erosion, Dryden and another influential Restoration poet, William Congreve, undertook to regularize the form. In his 1705 "Discourse on the Pindarique Ode," the preface to his "Daughters of Memory" ode (officially entitled *A Pindarique Ode Humbly offer'd to the Queen On the Victorious Progress of Her Majesty's Arms, under the Conduct of the Duke of Marlborough*), Congreve produced the first important critical response to Cowley and his imitators. Congreve terms this response "an Attempt towards restoring the Regularity of the ancient Lyrick Poetry, which seems to be altogether forgotten or unknown by our English writers." Cowley did capture Pindar's beauty, Congreve acknowledges, but stimulated a profusion of slipshod imitations. For Congreve, form – not freedom – is the true gratification in Pindar. He proposes an alternative basis for the English Pindaric: the "Harmony and Regularity of Pindar's Numbers." Congreve wanted to retain the ode's sublimity and force while elevating the form by its difficulty and complexity.

Congreve was mistaken in believing that English poets would heed his advice. The Pindaric ode's boldness and irregularity appealed to both poets and readers, kindling a connection between ancient Greek grandeur and modern British freedom that would flame out more fully in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Dryden was the more effective critic of Cowley and the irregular Pindaric, taking a practical rather than a theoretical approach to refining the ode's unevenness. Dryden exerted several lasting influences on the form, notably an inclusion and exaltation of humbler, more everyday subject matter within the province of the ode and a reorientation of the ode toward its musical origins. The ode had been inextricably linked with music in ancient Greece; indeed, the word *ode* derives from the Greek *aeidein*, "to sing," "to chant." Pindar's odes – like all the Greek *melic* or lyric poetry that influenced eighteenth-century poetry so powerfully – had been performed as song and dance, accompanied by the music of the flute or lyre. Until the seventeenth-century renewal of British interest (and beyond it, in some cases), the term *ode* referred not only to elevated public poems but also to lesser forms such as songs, hymns, and ballads. The elevated public ode was reunited with its musical origins in Milton, whose great "Nativity Ode" (1645) featured an exalted scene of divine music.

These changes are richly illustrated in two irregular Pindaric odes that Dryden wrote in honor of St. Cecilia's Day: "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day" (1687) and "Alexander's Feast" (1697). Dryden wrote these two St. Cecilia's Day odes ten years apart, participating in a tradition that began in 1683 and lasted until 1708. These poems were written each year by a prominent poet, set to music by a prominent composer, and performed at a festival in observance of the patron saint of music. Congreve,

Joseph Addison, and Alexander Pope also wrote well-known St. Cecilia's Day odes. In "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day," Dryden imagines an aural creation:

> From harmony, from heavenly harmony,
> This universal frame began:
> When nature underneath a heap
> Of jarring atoms lay,
> And could not heave her head,
> The tuneful voice was heard from high,
> "Arise, ye more than dead."
>
> (ll. 1–7)

Dryden again proposes music as a channel between the earthly and the sacred. Music exerts its power (in the poem and, presumably, in the concert space) by moving the passions of its listeners. The alarming trumpet, the "soft complaining" flute, the "warbling" lute, and the "sharp" violins in turn make their appeals to the passions; but only Cecilia's sacred organ can induce the appearance of an angel "Mistaking earth for heaven" (l. 54). The later ode, "Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Music," features a similar series of musical supplications, this time in the context of a more elaborate narrative, which imagines various passions produced by music during a royal feast celebrating the victory of Alexander the Great in Persia. In Dryden's legacy, eighteenth-century poets continued to write sacred and heroic odes intended for musical accompaniment and dramatic performance.

The Pindaric, the Sublime, and Milton

Several other factors coincided with Cowley's revolution to ensure the longevity of the Pindaric ode in the eighteenth century. One was the simultaneous introduction into English poetry and criticism of the sublime [*see* ch. 37, "THE SUBLIME"]. In 1652 appeared the first English translation of Longinus' powerfully influential treatise, *Peri Hupsous* ("On the Sublime"). Longinus, a Greek philosopher of the first century CE, explored the rhetorical effects of sublime style: a grand and lofty mode of writing whose explicit purpose is to move its audience to heightened emotion. The Pindaric shared with the sublime an insistence on emotional transport and elevation. The critical precept and the poetic form corresponded remarkably. Rounding out this cluster of reciprocal influences was a poet: Milton, a writer of the seventeenth century who for the eighteenth century embodied poetry's potential to attain celestial heights – a native talent who had equaled or even surpassed ancient achievements.

Unlike the immediately sensational Pindaric ode, the phenomena of Milton and the sublime, though available in the Restoration, exerted slightly delayed influences. By the turn of the century poets and critics were ready for Milton and his conduit to

sublime transport. In his 1706 ode, "The Adventurous Muse," Isaac Watts employs the genre for just such purposes:

> Give me the Chariot whose diviner Wheels,
> Mark their own Rout, and unconfin'd
> Bound o'er the everlasting Hills,
> And lose the Clouds below, and leave the Stars behind.
> Give me the Muse whose generous Force
> Impatient of the Reins
> Pursues an unattempted Course,
> Breaks all the Criticks Iron Chains,
> And bears to Paradise the raptur'd Mind.
>
> (ll. 26–34)

Watts's adventurous muse makes an interesting generic leap from the epic to the Pindaric ode. The "unattempted" course and the elevation to "Paradise" are references not to Milton's odes but to his epic *Paradise Lost* (1667). The destination to which Watts aspires is explicitly that occupied by his epic predecessor: "There Milton dwells: The Mortal sung / Themes not presum'd by mortal Tongue" (ll. 35–6). Not just Milton's sublimity but also his blank verse form inspire Watts, who sees in Milton's blank verse and Watts's own irregular Pindaric lines a shared disparagement of rhyme: "The noble Hater of degenerate Rhyme / Shook off the Chains, and built his Verse sublime, / A Monument too high for coupled sound to climb" (ll. 48–50). A crucial model for Watts's Pindarics is the Hebrew Bible, particularly the Psalms of David. For Watts and other eighteenth-century ode writers, David is another ancient exemplar. Decades later, the poet Christopher Smart composes one of the period's most amazing odes, *A Song to David* (1763).

A more influential contemporary of Watts was elaborating these same connections between Milton, the sublime, and the Pindaric ode, and pondering the relationship between poetry and religion. The critic, poet, and playwright John Dennis addresses vital questions about the nature and potential of poetry in two important critical treatises: *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701) and *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704) [*see* ch. 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"]. He lays out several influential propositions: that poetry is the noblest and most beneficial art; that contemporary poetry suffers from a fallen state; that the ancient poets excel the moderns not inherently but because ancient poetry concerns sacred rather than worldly subjects; that poetry works by raising passion in readers; that religious subjects provide the most effective way for poetry to induce that passion. Milton is for Dennis the poet who has most gloriously fulfilled the criteria for great poetry; and so, with Milton as his paradigm, Dennis sets himself the task to "restore Poetry to all its Greatness, and to all its Innocence" (*The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, I. 328). The ode, although one of the three branches of "greater poetry" along with the epic and tragedy, is for Dennis currently the most degenerate form because it has abandoned religious subjects. And so Dennis, like

Watts, envisions the ode among the loftiest forms of poetry, a heady junction of sublimity, religion, and Miltonic influence.

The Augustan Ode

A commonplace but mistaken assumption sets the eighteenth-century ode and Augustan satirical poetry at odds with one another. Several Augustan parodies are at least partly responsible for this assumption, perhaps most notoriously *Peri Bathous, or The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, a parody of Longinus published by Alexander Pope and his fellow Scriblerians in 1728. Elsewhere, for instance in his *Essay on Criticism* (1711), Pope praises Longinus as a model critic (see ll. 675–80). Pope himself wrote a St. Cecilia's Day ode in 1708, entitled "Ode for Musick, on St. Cecilia's Day." Swift's endeavors with the ode were more prolonged; early in his career he wrote a series of lengthy Pindarics celebrating such subjects as his patron Sir William Temple, King William, and William Congreve. But the most interesting convergences between Augustan poetry and the ode have less to do with the handful of odes written by satirists than with shared poetic values and techniques. Margaret Doody points out that the ode satisfied the "Augustan wish for unconstricted versing, formless form" (Doody 1985: 250). The couplet – the verse form that dominated the early decades of the eighteenth century – managed, when well handled, to capture the lively rhythms of speech and an incredibly wide range of sentiments and utterances within its seemingly orderly container. Likewise, the ode challenged a poet to experiment and to address diverse and sometimes unlikely or unruly concerns within an intricate pattern.

Anne Finch used the Pindaric ode in innovative ways to explore such subjects as the hurricane that struck Britain in 1703 and her own bouts of melancholy. In "Upon the Hurricane" (1713) she applies Pindaric reverence and seriousness to an awesomely destructive natural event:

> You num'rous Brethren of the Leafy Kind,
> To whatsoever Use design'd,
> Now, vain you found it to contend
> With not, alas! one Element your Friend;
> Your Mother Earth, thro' long preceding Rains,
> (Which undermining sink below)
> No more her wonted Strength retains;
> Nor you so fix'd within her Bosom grow,
> That for your sakes she can resolve to bear
> These furious Shocks of hurrying Air.
>
> (ll. 37–46)

Finch shares with her contemporaries an impulse to examine both the intricate literal details of this event – the process by which storms uproot trees, for instance – and its larger social, political, and moral meaning. Her ranging eye perceives both the

close-ups and the panorama of this scene, and in that sense she marks her Pindaric as an Augustan poem. "The Spleen" (1701), another Pindaric ode, scrutinizes "the spleen" – the eighteenth century's name for melancholy or depression – as a cultural phenomenon but also illustrates its painful personal effects: "I feel my Verse decay, and my crampt Numbers fail. / Through thy black Jaundies I all Objects see, / As dark and terrible as thee" (ll. 76–8). Margaret Doody is again helpful in articulating how the Augustan ode navigates between literal particulars and grander transformations: "it is almost the most journalistic of poetic forms in its turning to the topical, but it seeks to give large archetypal meaning to the history it discusses" (Doody 1985: 255). She argues that the Augustan ode, like the couplet, works by juxtaposing contrasting ideas, sounds, tones, voices, and languages, and then requiring an active reader to work these juxtapositions against one another.

The Horatian Tradition

Most of the odes discussed so far have been Pindaric odes, but an alternative tradition was available throughout the Restoration and eighteenth century: the Horatian ode, so named after its originator, the first-century BCE Roman poet Horace. His *Satires*, *Epistles*, and *Odes* were all translated and imitated abundantly by eighteenth-century British writers [*see* ch. 33, "THE CLASSICAL INHERITANCE"]. The Horatian ode differs from the Pindaric ode in a number of ways: while Pindarics aspire to extravagance and sublimity, Horatian odes are serene and contemplative in mood; the elaborate triadic structure of a Pindaric ode depends on sudden transitions and digressions, while a Horatian ode tends toward smoothness and poise in less intricate stanzas. Pindar's odes were staged publicly and accompanied by music and dance, but Horace's odes were always meant to be read privately. Readers have praised the Horatian ode for its quiet but moving meditations as well as its elegance and urbanity, qualities very different from the Pindaric's harsh splendor. This Horatian tradition had, unlike the Pindaric, been recognized during the Middle Ages, though the Horatian ode did not become a popular form for imitation until the sixteenth century. Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, was an early practitioner of the form, followed by Renaissance poets Sir Walter Raleigh, Michael Drayton, Robert Herrick, Ben Jonson, and Richard Fanshawe. Andrew Marvell wrote a famous and influential Horatian ode about a politically controversial subject: "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland" (written 1650, published 1681).

After the Restoration, poets like Congreve and Dryden imitated the Horatian ode. Typical in these imitations was the Horatian injunction to live in the present and enjoy the pleasures of a simple rural life – books, friends, and wine – rather than chasing the temptations of wealth and power, of which death deprives even the richest. In his imitation entitled "The Ninth Ode of the First Book of Horace" (1685), for instance, Dryden recommends immediate delights despite a cold and dreary winter day:

With well-heaped logs dissolve the cold,
And feed the genial hearth with fires;
Produce the wine, that makes us bold,
And sprightly wit and love inspires.
(ll. 7–10)

Matthew Prior employed the Horatian ode for more overtly political purposes, celebrating political events ranging from the coronation of James and Mary in 1685 to William's arrival in Holland after Mary's death in 1694 and military success under Queen Anne in 1706. Prior's elegant "An Ode, Humbly Inscrib'd to the Queen. On the Glorious Success of Her Majesty's Arms" (1706) is striking because it combines an imitation of Horace with an imitation of Edmund Spenser. In his preface to this ode, Prior justifies this unlikely junction of classical and native traditions:

> My Two Great Examples, Horace and Spenser, in many Things resemble each other: Both have a Height of Imagination, and a Majesty of Expression in describing the Sublime; and Both know to temper those Talents, and sweeten the Description, so as to make it Lovely as well as Pompous: Both have equally That agreeable Manner of mixing Morality with their Story, and That *Curiosa Felicitas* in the Choice of their Diction, which every Writer aims at, and so very few have reach'd: Both are particularly Fine in their Images, and Knowing in their Numbers.

Prior is forward-looking in his use of the ode to trace a native lineage as well as an ancient one [*see* ch. 35, "Recovering the Past: Shakespeare, Spenser, and British Poetic Tradition"]. He makes a double gesture to render classical conventions British, turning Horace's praise of Rome to his own praise of Britain as a nation and linking Horace and Spenser as equally viable poetic wellsprings. In a comparison like this, one can glimpse an early expression of the turn the ode will take by the middle of the eighteenth century, both toward "Height of Imagination" as an aesthetic purpose and toward the elevation of a native British poetic tradition.

The Midcentury Revival

In the preface to his 1764 volume of odes, Richard Shepherd describes the difference between the earlier generations of Restoration and eighteenth-century odes and the midcentury revival and revision of the form:

> Of the descriptive and allegorical Ode, the Writings of the Ancients afford no Example . . . This Species of Writing is in almost every Circumstance different from the Pindarick Ode, which has its foundation in Fact and Reality, that Fact worked up and heightened by a studied Pomp and Grandeur of Expression; it not only admits of, but requires bold Digressions, abrupt and hasty Transitions: while the other is built intirely

upon Fancy, and Ease and Simplicity of Diction are its peculiar Characteristicks. (Chapin 1955: 40)

Shepherd notes several important qualities of the midcentury ode: that it tends to be descriptive, allegorical, reliant upon "Fancy," and less difficult than the earlier Pindaric. This combination of descriptive and allegorical aspects may seem peculiar but is essential to understanding this midcentury rendition of the ode. First, the allegorical: the midcentury ode moved away from celebrating tangible, external phenomena (like King William or Anne Killigrew or a hurricane) and instead fixed its attention on allegorical personifications of intangible, abstract qualities or phenomena (like Simplicity or Evening or Cheerfulness). More and more, the ode took the form of direct and prolonged address of a personified abstraction. For example, William Collins addresses a personified Pity in his 1746 "Ode to Pity": "O Thou, the Friend of Man assign'd, / With balmy Hands his wounds to bind, / And charm his frantic Woe" (ll. 1–3). Collins's Pity is not like the subjects celebrated in older odes. Poet and reader understand that Pity, while real as an emotion, is fictional as a being in a poem. It may seem strange, then, for a poet to describe an abstracted being. What would Pity look like? Collins provides a lovely embodiment of her: "Long, Pity, let the nations view / Thy sky-worn Robes of tend'rest Blue, / And Eyes of dewy Light!" (ll. 9–12). Poets like Collins are often as interested in the abstraction's visual characteristics as in its intangible qualities, which is what Richard Shepherd means when he says these odes are descriptive as well as allegorical.

Shepherd's characterization also includes the important observation that midcentury odes are "built intirely upon Fancy." If the point of midcentury odes is not to show abstract personifications like Pity engaged in heroic actions – in the way that earlier Pindarics often depicted real historical events and persons – then the interest must be located elsewhere. Indeed, these midcentury odes consciously reject the historical interests shared by earlier odes and the larger body of Augustan poetry. The Advertisement to Joseph Warton's *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746) has served as a kind of founding declaration for this new kind of ode:

> The Public has been so much accustom'd of late to didactic Poetry alone, and Essays on moral Subjects, that any work where the imagination is much indulged, will perhaps not be relished or regarded. The author therefore of these pieces is in some pain lest certain austere critics should think them too fanciful and descriptive. But as he is convinced that the fashion of moralizing in verse has been carried too far, and as he looks upon Invention and Imagination to be the chief faculties of a Poet, so he will be happy if the following Odes may be look'd upon as an attempt to bring back Poetry into its right Channel.

Opposing his odes more broadly to Augustan satiric and moral poetry, Warton emphasizes the imagination as a "chief faculty" of the poet. These midcentury poets replace the action of an external subject with an internal act of the poet's mind:

Warton calls it "Imagination"; Shepherd calls it "Fancy." In fact, a poet is a poet by virtue of this imaginative vision that allows him to invoke personified abstractions and be transformed by the encounter. In these encounters with personifications, poetic speakers typically turn away from the busy, public, day-lit world toward a dim and solitary natural scene where they can experience an imaginative vision. Warton's own "Ode to Fancy" features such a scene:

> Tell me the path, sweet wand'rer, tell,
> To thy unknown sequester'd cell,
> Where woodbines cluster round the door,
> Where shells and moss o'erlay the floor.
> (ll. 33–6)

Mark Akenside describes a similarly secluded scene of vision in his ode "To the Evening-Star" (1772):

> Now, Hesper, guide my feet
> Down the red marle with moss o'ergrown,
> Through yon wild thicket next the plain,
> Whose hawthorns choke the winding lane
> Which leads to her retreat.
> See the Green space: on either hand
> Enlarg'd it spreads around.
> (ll. 44–50)

The sites of imaginative vision in these poems are frequently scenes of nature, which takes on a new significance in this midcentury poetry.

Three important collections of odes – Akenside's *Odes on Several Subjects* (1745), Collins's *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects* (1746), and Warton's *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746) – were published within a span of two years and together introduce many of the form's new directions. Collins and Warton had in fact initially planned a joint venture (until a publisher intervened). Akenside's odes, the earliest collection, break less dramatically than Warton or Collins from Augustan poetry. His subjects include personal and autobiographical ones – for instance "To a Friend, Unsuccessful in Love" – and are widely variant in matter and mood. Among Akenside's subjects are the winter solstice, cheerfulness, leaving Holland, the muse, Sir Francis Henry Drake, lyric poetry, and the evening star. The light of day shines more brightly in Akenside's odes than in Warton's or Collins's. In the "Hymn to Cheerfulness," Akenside leaves the melancholy mood to his contemporaries: "see where yonder pensive sage . . . Retires in desart scenes to dwell, / And bids the joyless world farewell" (ll. 105, 109–10). On the subject of the imagination, however, he is as enthusiastic as any of his melancholy contemporaries. In his ambitious Pindaric ode "On Lyric Poetry," Akenside rhapsodizes about his imaginative transport:

my presaging mind,
Conscious of powers she never knew,
Astonish'd grasps at things beyond her view,
Nor by another's fate submits to be confin'd.
(ll. 117–20)

Unlike Akenside's, both Warton's and Collins's odes repeatedly stage the scenario of the poet's encounter with a personified abstraction. Both poets favor moods of quiet seclusion, addresses to female personifications, and imaginative transformations to an otherworldly space at the hands of the invoked quality. Their separate odes to evening reflect these preferences and also reveal interesting differences between the two poets. Both poets personify evening as a female figure; but Warton imagines her a "meek-ey'd maiden, clad in sober grey" (l. 1), while Collins evokes a more elusive and changeable figure who is in turn a "nymph reserved" (l. 5), a "maid composed" (l. 15), and a "calm vot'ress" (l. 29). Warton's evening scene is social and cheerful, populated by the whistling "weary woodman" who is "homeward bent to kiss his prattling babes" (ll. 2–3), "stout ploughmen" who "meet to wrestle on the green" (l. 16), and the "swain" who "artless sings on yonder rock" (l. 17). Collins's is a lonelier scene, silent

save where the weak-eyed bat
With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn.
(ll. 9–12)

After describing the components of the twilight scene, Warton entreats Evening to include him in her imaginative power: "O modest Evening, oft let me appear / A wandering votary in thy pensive train" (ll. 25–6). Collins alternates between painting the evening scene and contemplating the effect of his song on Evening's "modest ear" (l. 2). His description of the scene and request to partake of it fuse:

Now teach me, maid composed,
To breathe some softened strain,
Whose numbers, stealing through thy dark'ning vale,
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,
As, musing slow, I hail
Thy genial loved return!
(ll. 15–20)

Both odes aspire to shades considerably gentler than the sublime. They depict fanciful, rural scenes dominated not by grand Olympian deities but by humbler, local animations of nature.

Poetic retreats to rustic bowers and encounters with abstractions may seem remote from national and political concerns. In various ways, however, midcentury odes

engage with just such concerns. One way is by announcing their descent from a British poetic tradition – particularly from Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, and John Milton – and reclaiming these poets' access to nature, the sublime, and the imagination. Some earlier poets like John Dennis and Matthew Prior had used the ode to praise and lay claim to the British poetic tradition, but the midcentury poets found new reasons to align themselves with this ancestry. Thomas Gray, in his ode "The Progress of Poesy" (1757), traces the lineage of British poetry, including a sketch of Shakespeare in the lap of Mother Nature:

> The dauntless Child
> Stretch'd forth his little arms and smiled.
> This pencil take she said, whose colours clear
> Richly paint the vernal year.
>
> (ll. 87–90)

Shakespeare is seen as the poet of nature and fancy, attuned to the deepest feelings and able to animate them imaginatively. Even more compelling to these poets is Milton, whose imagination they view as wilder, more sublime, perhaps even inaccessible in their age. Gray's portrait in "The Progress of Poesy" embodies the age's enthrallment with Milton as well as its uncertainty about assuming Milton's power:

> Nor second He, that rode sublime
> Upon the seraph-wings of Exstasy,
> The secrets of th' Abyss to spy.
> He pass'd the flaming bounds of Place and Time:
> The living Throne, the sapphire-blaze
> Where Angels tremble, while they gaze,
> He saw; but blasted with excess of light,
> Closed his eyes in endless night.
>
> (ll. 95–102)

Not every Miltonic echo in the mid-eighteenth century is quite so extraterrestrial. Gray's transgressive Milton is the epic Milton of *Paradise Lost*. Just as influential on the period, particularly as models for the ode, were two lyric poems, "L'Allegro" (1645) and "Il Penseroso" (1645). These companion poems feature two female personifications, the first mirthful and the second melancholic, addressed by a speaker who wishes to dwell with each in turn. Midcentury poets admired Milton's ability to bring these abstractions vividly and visually to life; this aspect of Milton inspired imitation rather than intimidation. By sketching and claiming the poetic legacy of poets like Milton, Shakespeare, and Spenser, the midcentury poets help to shape notions of British literary history.

Gray extended the British poetic lineage further back in his Pindaric ode "The Bard" (1757). In the wake of his unexpectedly popular *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard* (1751), Gray chose to attempt a more ambitious form: the regular

Pindaric. Applying the advice of Congreve as almost no one else in the eighteenth century had, Gray published two regular Pindarics in 1757: "The Bard" and "The Progress of Poesy." These demanding poems explored the distant origins of present-day British poetry, combining a rigorous execution of the Pindaric form with the poetic concerns of Gray's era. In "The Progress of Poesy," Gray traces a history of poetry from ancient Greece to modern Britain. He asserts Britain's claim to have succeeded Greece and Rome as the seat of poetic power: "When Latium had her lofty spirit lost, / They sought, oh Albion! next thy sea-encircled coast" (ll. 81–2). This ambitious association of ancient poetic achievement and a modern British lineage gives way to an uncertain conclusion. The lyre of Fancy falls silent, as Gray ponders who might "wake" the instrument again. Such a successor occupies in this poem a curious intermediary position: "Yet shall he mount, and keep his distant way / Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate, / Beneath the Good how far – but far above the Great" (ll. 121–3). This puzzling final line has come to embody for modern readers the ambiguity and hesitation with which many midcentury poets colored the full realization of their ambitious poetic visions. Critical accounts have frequently exaggerated midcentury poets' anxieties and uncertainties about their poetic inheritance; rather, the combination of bold assertion and disrupting interference with that assertion may well be the most interesting characteristic of these poets. Gray's "The Bard," for instance, employs the modern Pindaric to memorialize the slaughter of thirteenth-century British poets by Edward I. His defiant bard prophesies the doomed fate of Edward's family, the Plantagenets, because of this transgression, but then plunges from a mountain to his death at the end of the poem. Again, this poem both asserts a bold connection to British poetic ancestry – imagining the figure of the poet as controversial and dangerous within the sphere of the nation – but then ends with that poet's suicide. Gray had been inspired to write this ode after seeing a blind harpist named John Parry perform at Cambridge. His figure of the bard embodied the midcentury ode's new claims of access to imaginative inspiration and its insistent links to a native British tradition.

The midcentury ode was self-consciously British not only in its claimed ancestry but in its subject matter. Even before Gray, Akenside, Collins, and Warton used the form to animate a distinctly British natural scene, the ode paid tribute to British military and commercial might. Edward Young published two lengthy odes, *Ocean: An Ode, Occasioned by His Majesty's Royal Encouragement of the Sea Service* (1728) and *Imperium Pelagi. A Naval Lyric* (1730), both of which celebrate emerging British imperial power. In *Imperium Pelagi*, Young envisions a voracious Britain appropriating goods from across the globe:

> Cold Russia costly furs from far,
> Hot China sends her painted jar,
> France generous wines to crown it: Arab sweet
> With gales of incense swells our sails;
> Nor distant Ind our merchant fails,

Her richest ore the ballast of our fleet.
. . .
All these one British harvest make!
The servant Ocean for thy sake
Both sinks and swells: his arms thy bosom wrap,
And fondly give, in boundless dower
To mighty George's growing power,
The wafted world into thy loaded lap.
(ll. 73–8, 85–90)

Suvir Kaul has made a fascinating argument that the relationship between such nationalist discourse and the ode was not accidental. Suggesting that the ode made a "topical and urgent contribution to the civic discourse of the nation" (Kaul 2000: 191), he argues that the ode's access to sublimity and poetic power suited an expansionist nation. Poets like Young assert Britain's imperial ambition through the ode's rhetorical technique of apostrophe, which then ceases to be simply a "vocative O" and instead enacts nationalist aspirations (ll. 211–12). Kaul's reading helps to emphasize the ode's increasing attention to British power (political and poetic) over the course of the eighteenth century, and it complicates the assumption that the midcentury ode seeks uncomplicated retreat from public concerns.

See also chs. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"; 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"; 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"; 19, "William Collins, 'Ode on the Poetical Character' "; 33, "The Classical Inheritance"; 34, "Augustanism and Pre-Romanticism"; 37, "The Sublime."

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29
The Georgic

Juan Christian Pellicer

Georgic verse – modeled on Virgil's didactic poem on plant and animal husbandry, the *Georgics* (*c*.36–29 BCE) – burgeoned in the eighteenth century as never before or since. In a literary climate favorable to imitation of the classics, poets adapted Virgil's combination of practical instruction and politically suggestive description to comment on their own society. Just as Virgil deploys agricultural instruction to promote an ethos of responsible management under Augustus Caesar, essential to the transition from a time of civil war to an era of peace and prosperity, British georgics, most written in the half-century following the union of Scotland, England, and Wales in 1707, try to demonstrate in emphatically practical, "preceptive" (instructive) terms, how the newly unified nation's productive and imperial energies should be regulated and harnessed.

The influence of the *Georgics* pervades eighteenth-century literature. It is powerfully felt in a wide range of generically diverse poetic works that incorporate Virgilian material flexibly, such as Pope's *Windsor-Forest* (1713) and James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726–44). The main focus of this essay will be the important group of poems in the formal georgic mode, the earliest John Philips's *Cyder* (1708), which use Virgil as their template (Chalker 1969: 36). These poems, like their model, often had a strong political and civic dimension. Philips's *Cyder* introduces the reader to the ways of Herefordshire apple-growing and cider-making. It also aims to promote the moderate Tory politics of Philips's ministerial patrons, with a view to healing divisions between oppositional ("Country") and pro-government Tories. William Somervile's *The Chace* (1735) is similarly designed to unite moderate Tories and opposition Whigs under the aegis of Frederick Prince of Wales (Gerrard 1994: 217–20). Christopher Smart's *The Hop-Garden*, on cultivating hops in his native Kent (written 1742–3, published 1752), presents an exuberant and politically dissident counterpart to Philips's *Cyder*. Robert Dodsley's *Agriculture* (1753), which addresses the future George III, embraces a remarkably broad range of topics and widens the British georgic's scope for civic instruction. John Dyer's *The Fleece*

(1757), the most ambitious and artistically successful venture in the formal georgic mode, describes the various processes involved in the woolen industry and traces the growth of Britain's mercantile empire through the global diffusion of its textiles, placing homely tasks against a historical backdrop of "epic" scope. The adaptation of the Virgilian georgic to reflect contemporary scientific, commercial, and imperial concerns climaxes in James Grainger's Caribbean georgic *The Sugar-Cane* (1764), while William Mason's *The English Garden* (1772–81) reflects georgic's subsequent retreat from the Virgilian themes of commerce and empire.

Instruction and its Limits

As the above list suggests, the georgic flourished by seeking new subjects for attention. Poets such as John Gay and Jonathan Swift extended it to the new urban scene: hence Gay's *Trivia; Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716) burlesques, or perhaps reinvents, the georgic by transferring it from the country to the city. Sometimes the mode could survive without being attached to a main location at all, as we can see in the physician-poet John Armstrong's *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744), with its confident assumption of a "prescriptive" Virgilian form. But whatever its subject matter, the formal or prescriptive georgic is "unabashedly factual" (De Bruyn 1997: 63) and "relies on . . . the credibility of an expert speaker" (Rothstein 1981: 146). When John Gay revised *Rural Sports* (1713) in 1720, his introduction of new prescriptive sections warranted the change of subtitle from *A Poem* to *A Georgic*. Sir Roger Mynors's commentary on the *Georgics* (Virgil 1990) illustrates the "hands-on" approach of eighteenth-century georgic, which posits practical soundness as an essential condition. Yet more is involved than getting the facts right. While the idiom of instruction must be soundly based, it invariably serves a *literary* purpose. Sometimes the poet merely affects a grave didactic instructiveness to allow scope for flights of speculation or wit, or to introduce digressive episodes. Smart's *Hop-Garden* includes a vignette of domestic life in which the ivory-handed Dorinda unexpectedly finds "a negro's nail" among the raisins for her Christmas pudding (ii. 222–32). The raisins are recycled from wine grapes trampled by Malagan slaves. The fact that this episode has a genuine agricultural basis (Mounsey 2001: 76) complicates its didactic import. Is the poet's main concern to remind English hop-packers to wear slippers when treading hops into sacks? Seneca's point that Virgil "wrote not to teach farmers, but to delight readers" (Wilkinson 1969: 15) was not lost on eighteenth-century poets and their audiences. No georgic has ever been intended to be read primarily as a manual. While many manuals, like georgics, fall short of being entirely systematic or comprehensive, what distinguishes georgic verse is the poet's selectiveness on aesthetic grounds. Even Grainger, the poet who places the highest premium on the informative value of his own georgic, asserts in his review of *The Fleece* that "such precepts ought only to be delivered, and such objects painted, as can be represented to the imagination in agreeable colours" (Grainger 1757: 329).

As Grainger's statement suggests, georgic was understood as an essentially descriptive mode. Its didactic value derives from its mimetic functions on many levels, not only from its preceptive component. Thus Thomson's *The Seasons* is rightly classed among British georgics – indeed, it is the richest and most influential work in the Virgilian tradition – despite its general avoidance of practical instruction. Thomson's more purely "philosophical" approach ultimately reflects the inspiration of Virgil's master Lucretius (*c.*99–55 BCE), whose scientific epic *De Rerum Natura* represented, despite its provoking insistence that the gods do not intervene in human affairs, the classical benchmark for the more ambitious kinds of scientific and didactic verse produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For eighteenth-century readers, Joseph Addison's "Essay on the *Georgics*" (1697) captured the spirit of the mode. Addison and Wilkinson (1969) both stress the importance of variation as a basic compositional principle, and consider the representation of variety itself to be one of georgic's main achievements. Variation is a rhetorical principle that points beyond itself. For Addison it reflects the plenitude of the Creation, and thus satisfies a providential predisposition of the human mind to roam freely (*Spectator*, nos. 413–14). Georgic variety should, he thinks, be presented, as in landscape gardening, by "concealing the bounds": precepts, for instance, "shou'd all be so finely wrought together into the same Piece, that no course Seam may discover where they joyn" (1987: 146).

Balance and Proportion

Georgic mimesis is also deliberately contrastive. As Wilkinson observes, Virgil is a master of vivid relief, and the versatile mode he invented is distinguished by "artistic principles of balance and contrast, interplay of great and small, *chiaroscuro* of light and shade, striking juxtapositions . . . of gaiety and grimness, humor and pathos, mythology and modernity, [native] and foreign" (1969: 72).

Georgic, then, is devoted to picking out contrasts in a conjunctive vein, passing easily from one subject to another "by association of ideas" (Rothstein 1981: 148). Yet its discursive manner is deceptive, or rather artful: georgic only ostensibly rambles. In fact the poet may usually be relied on to pick his way methodically as he demonstrates basic principles of balance and proportion, teaching how to avoid or temper extremes – the cardinal lessons of georgic instruction. Using the demonstration of basic principles as a structuring device, the poet implicitly invites figurative applications and topical readings. For instance, in Philips's passage contrasting his exemplary Virgilian "frugal Man" with fraudulent ciderists (*Cyder*, ii. 115–45) the reader recognizes a familiar pattern in which frugality is shown first in a state of well-tempered proportion and then, by contrast, gone wrong. The Virgilian ciderist ripens prematurely fallen apples in hay-wreathed tumps, illustrating frugality in its benign aspect. Unscrupulous dealers, on the other hand, eke out their cider by mixing in turnip juice. Worse still, Devonshire cider-makers boil the must, killing the fruit's "spirit";

extraneous yeasts would then be added to ferment an unnaturally strong drink. These bad ciderists illustrate avarice, or "frugality" in its malign aspect. Contrasts and parallels support the structural logic. The artificial heat of the cider-cooker contrasts with "the Sun's mellowing Beams." The fraudulent blenders and cider-makers of *Cyder*, Book II, counterbalance the avaricious soil-improvers of Book I, who were rebuked for importing foreign soils (ll. 119–25). This underscores Philips's injunction, variously reiterated throughout his poem, to honor the native material – a moral which, coupled with references to things "foreign" in a pejorative sense, easily suggests a hostile allusion to the Hanoverian succession. Britain's various soils represent, like the nation's constitution, mixture in its benign aspect (Fairer 2003a: 93), while "Foreign Vintage, insincere, and mixt" (*Cyder*, i. 531) is censured.

Rhetorical Energies

It is necessary to stress georgic's structural orderliness because its more eye- and ear-catching qualities often give an impression of unresisted rhetorical energies. Georgic's associative procedure certainly enables an extraordinary freedom of topical and scenic movement. New readers of *The Fleece* may struggle to get their bearings as Dyer sweeps them panoramically through a series of regions and landscapes, pointing out landmarks, country houses, and centers of industry, all the while observing the suitability of different terrains and natural habitats for raising sheep. Inspired by his friend Thomson, Dyer brings the remotest parts of the world before the reader and recalls scenes from antiquity even as he describes local English and Welsh conditions and occupations. All is movement and energy. Though it may be going a bit too far to claim that georgic is "polyphonic," the mode has been plausibly described as "symphonic" (Wilkinson 1969: 74).

Georgic is famously a "mixed" genre, and prospered in a period that cultivated impurity of genre as a condition of aesthetic fertility. Committed to diversity, georgic easily incorporates elements of other kinds of verse, for instance topographical verse and the country-house poem, just as georgic elements are contained in many long poems of composite genre, such as Richard Jago's prospect poem *Edge-Hill* (1767). Georgic even incorporates its own alternative, pastoral, with confident self-awareness. Dyer's shepherding advice in Book I culminates in a formal eclogue finale, and Philips's "swains" sing pastoral lyrics by Phineas Fletcher (*Cyder*, ii. 108). Yet georgic is distinct from pastoral, as Addison tells us, in that the georgic poet does not imitate the simplicity of the rural characters he represents, but writes "with the Address of a Poet" (Addison 1987: 145). While pastoral reveals poetic craft by appearing to conceal it, georgic glories in poetic device. "Now, of the sever'd lock begin the song," Dyer announces, "With various numbers, thro' the simple theme / To win attention: this, ye shepherd swains, / This is a labour" (*The Fleece*, ii. 1–4). The challenge to the poet in elevating a "low" topic (cf. *Georgics*, iii. 289–90) is wittily acknowledged in Dyer's echo of the Sibyl's words in *Aeneid*, vi. 129: "hoc opus, hic

labor est" – "the descent to the underworld is easy; the hard task is to rise." The pleasures of georgic lie precisely in appreciating the poet's "Address," his readiness and fertility of expression, as well as the ideas and images he conveys.

The Influence of Milton

This delight in poetic resourcefulness suggests why eighteenth-century georgic is grafted on the verbal stock of *Paradise Lost*. Philips's preference for the language of Milton's epic made perfect sense to his contemporaries. For the critic William Benson, who treats Milton as Virgil's English counterpart, the hallmarks of Milton's style coincide precisely with "the principal Excellencies of *Virgil*'s Versification," which display the arts of metrical variation, "varying the pause," verbal patterning, and poetic expressiveness (Benson 1739: 18–38). Further "Virgilian" aspects of Milton's style include its allusiveness, the dignity of its diction, the thematic capaciousness of its long periods, and its use of the verse paragraph as a basic unit of composition [*see* ch. 25, "Rhyming Couplets and Blank Verse"]. Milton's practice of syntactic inversion achieves something like the freedom of word order in Latin, and his use of enjambment seems specifically indebted to Virgil (Porter 1993: 94). Like Virgil, Milton uses proper names evocatively and draws on knowledge of various occupations in employing "terms of art." Milton's rejection of rhyme not only brings him closer to Latin models, but also carries national connotations: his famous note on the verse of *Paradise Lost* associates blank verse with British liberty. Most importantly, Milton supplied georgic poets with the materials for a remarkably absorptive poetic idiom, a language designed to draw on a heterogeneous wealth of source material (Latin as well as English) and to achieve an exceptional density of reference within the compass of a coherent, decorous style. Some of these Virgilian-cum-Miltonic qualities are reflected in the section on fabric dyeing in *The Fleece*, Book II:

> For it suffices not, in flow'ry vales,
> Only to tend the flock, and shear soft wool:
> Gums must be stor'd of Guinea's arid coast;
> Mexican woods, and India's bright'ning salts;
> Fruits, herbage, sulphurs, minerals, to stain
> The fleece prepar'd, which oil-imbibing earth
> Of Wooburn blanches, and keen allum-waves
> Intenerate. With curious eye observe,
> In what variety the tribe of salts,
> Gums, ores, and liquors, eye-delighting hues
> Produce, abstersive or restringent; how
> Steel casts the sable; how pale pewter, fus'd
> In fluid spirit'ous, the scarlet dye;
> And how each tint is made, or mixt, or chang'd,
> By mediums colourless: why is the fume

Of sulphur kind to white and azure hues,
Pernicious else: why no materials yield
Singly their colours, those except that shine
With topaz, sapphire, and cornelian rays:
And why, though nature's face is cloath'd in green,
No green is found to beautify the fleece,
But what repeated toil by mixture gives.
(ii. 562–83)

The topic invites gorgeous description and introduces the Virgilian theme of the providential variety of local produce with its associated commerce (cf. *Georgics*, i. 54–61, ii. 109–24; *Spectator*, no. 69). Like Virgil and Milton, Dyer perceives "the effectiveness of ranging widely over the earth in examples" (Wilkinson 1969: 67). His mention of West Africa, Mexico, and India as chief sources of dyes and mordants directs the reader's thoughts to the three main continents of the colonial world before attention is drawn to the famous fuller's earth from Woburn in Bedfordshire, thus observing the complementarity of native and exotic materials. The variety of kinds of natural substances (gums, wood, mineral salts, fuller's earth) and their active properties as colorants, astringents, and solvents, as well as their more "poetic" associative qualities of fragrance, color, and texture, are sensuously evoked by mutual contrast, recalling Milton's description of Eden in *Paradise Lost*, Book IV. Dyer views the chemical industries as proceeding from the plenitude of the natural world, adapting Milton's enumeration of paradisal "herb, tree, fruit, and flower" (*Paradise Lost*, iv. 644) to include, in line 566, "sulphurs" and "minerals." The georgic Eden – like Milton's, not a purely pastoral location – easily contains the postlapsarian world. The description of dye colors by reference to gemstones brightens the already "paradisal" coloring of the verse. The passage presents a feast for the eye (the Miltonic compound epithet "oil-imbibing," for instance, is visually compelling) as well as the ear: the alliteration is bracing ("steel casts the sable"; "pale pewter"; "fus'd / In fluid"; "made, or mixt"); an enjambed period is drawn to a halt with satisfying gravity in polysyllabic "Intenerate," producing with the ensuing break a *rubato* effect; and the unusual syntax whereby the object ("eye-delighting hues") is interposed between the subject ("Gums, ores, and liquors") and its qualifying adjectives ("abstersive or restringent") orchestrates a pleasant shock by contrasting the pleasure promised by the colors with the harshness of the mordants.

Progress and Commerce

Dyer's ideal eye – a roving, "georgic" eye – is scientifically "curious": the injunctions to observe "how" and "why" emphasize his restless empirical drive. Typically, georgic method is experimental ("Trials must decide": *The Sugar-Cane*, i. 246). Philips urges apple cultivators to be guided by "experience" in the sense of "experiment" (*Cyder*,

i. 326; *OED* 1. b). But georgic wisdom also consists in catching "sparks from experience," garnering "knowledge rare" from "improving talk" (*The Fleece*, ii. 552–4). For Dyer, science progresses incrementally, and sometimes also fortuitously, as when the Dutch alchemist Cornelius Drebbel (1572–1633), "seeking the secret source of gold," discovered the use of tin as a mordant for cochineal (ii. 584–90). Characteristically, this modern example (which owes something to Philips's casting of the modern scientist as alchemist, as e.g. in *Cyder*, ii. 333–43) is linked with a corresponding example from antiquity, which "prefigures" Drebbel's discovery of the link between tin and red dye. Dyer relates how the Phoenician hero-god Melqart (Tyrian Melicertes, identified by the Greeks as a local Hercules and by Dyer as an all-round georgic hero) first introduced Cornish tin to the Mediterranean, and how he chanced to discover the famous "Tyrian purple," a crimson dye yielded by the murex, a shellfish, when he observed its stain on his sheepdog's mouth: this is the discovery that "drew the pomp of trade to rising Tyre" (ii. 591–9). A great deal is going on here that is central to georgic's concerns. Scientific innovation is viewed in an evolutionary perspective, in which growth is represented as a cumulative process rather than a progressive displacement of the old by the new. Characteristically, georgic juxtaposes the old and the new in a spirit of extension and conservation (Fairer 2003a: 98). For this reason, though georgic poets are typically *au fait* with their scientific and agricultural topics, it will always be possible to accuse the poet of having failed to "choose" between the ancient and the modern, or between the old-fashioned and the up-to-the-minute. Dyer is not concerned to applaud or condemn "progress," but rather to suggest traces of providential continuity and recurrence in the connections he observes between the worlds of ancient and modern industry and trade: the links between shepherding, tin mining, and dyeing; between Britons and Phoenicians as maritime commercial peoples.

Georgic has always been commercially orientated. Since Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Odysseus' description of the Cyclops' island in *The Odyssey* Book IX (which contains the earliest contrastive description of pastoral and georgic landscapes in literature), georgic has described the ties between cultivated nature and maritime trade. The Virgilian theme of natural variety and its social mirror image, commerce, has already been observed. Among the many "georgic" utterances in *The Spectator*, perhaps the most emblematic is Addison's declaration in no. 414 that "the prettiest Landskip I ever saw, was one drawn on the Walls of a dark Room [a *camera obscura*], which stood opposite on one side to a navigable River, and on the other to a Park." This interplay of maritime and natural worlds precisely defines georgic. Underlining his attempt to further incorporate pastoral, Dyer has a "georgic" ship trim its sails by a pastiche-pastoral riverbank in the final lines of *The Fleece* Book I, and the end of the work triumphantly concludes its seaborne movement eastward and westward from secluded English and Welsh "pastoral" valleys to the farthest outposts of Britain's commercial empire (Barrell 1983: 91–9). Maritime trade is Dyer's great theme for sublime treatment. He uses georgic in part to naturalize commercial panegyric (the vein of Richard Glover's *London: or, the Progress of Commerce*, 1739) in the physico-theological tradition:

> And when the priest displays, in just discourse,
> HIM, the all-wise CREATOR, and declares
> His presence, pow'r, and goodness, unconfin'd,
> 'Tis Trade, attentive voyager, who fills
> His lips with argument.
>
> (*The Fleece*, ii. 613–17)

Yet although *The Fleece* fully illustrates the degree to which commerce is germane to georgic concerns, trade is not equally important in all British georgics, as the examples of Somervile and Armstrong most obviously show. Philips's *Cyder* praises not the merchant fleet but the British navy, in support of a Tory blue-water policy rather than the commercial expansionism of later decades. Pope's *Windsor-Forest* (1713) begins to develop the theme of "benevolent" imperial trade in British georgic. In the years of the "Patriot" opposition to the Walpole ministry (which continued a few years beyond his resignation in 1742), this idealism gives way to a more aggressive version of the blue-water naval policy, urged in Smart's *Hop-Garden* as an instrument of commercial expansion.

What seems beyond doubt is that the reputation of trade among the reading public is a crucial variable in the career of British georgic. The rise of georgic in the first half of the eighteenth century coincides with a generally sympathetic, often celebratory, portrayal of commerce and merchants in polite literature – Defoe and Thomson are two of the many writers one might mention [*see also* ch. 2, "POETRY, POLITICS, AND EMPIRE"]. Georgic's decline coincides with the increasing hostility to "trade's unfeeling train" in the literature of the second half of the century (Raven 1992: 3–5). By 1810 Grainger's editor Alexander Chalmers objects to *The Sugar-Cane* on the grounds of its commercial topic: "what lessens the respect of the reader for the poem in general, is the object so often repeated, so unpoetical and unphilosophical, *wealth*" (Gilmore 2000: 49). Dyer stands astride this development. His account of the rise and ruin of Tyre in the conclusion of Book II of *The Fleece* warns simultaneously against holding tradesmen in contempt and against falling prey to the corruptive influence of wealth. The passage is a georgic set-piece based on Ezekiel 27, and is designed to parallel Virgil's account of the portents of Rome's disasters and the prayer for salvation concluding *Georgics* Book I (cf. the parallel set-piece in *Cyder*, i. 187–247). Dyer's defense of trade acknowledges its potential for moral corrosion quite as fully as John Brown's popular philippic against "luxury," *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, also published in 1757. Dyer is equally anxious that Britain should escape the fates of Tyre and Rome, and his stern paraphrase of Ezekiel shows that he offers hope not lightly, but in a spirit of prayer. Yet hope it is. Whereas Brown can see no way to avoid national enfeeblement and ruin except by limiting commerce, georgic allows Dyer to propose that militant discipline in industry will regulate the effects of the wealth it produces. The real enemies are not "toil and wealth," but "sloth and pride." Armstrong's *Art of Preserving Health* teaches that the circulatory system, in a well-exercised, healthy body, repairs the tissues it also corrodes (ii. 21–30): "the

natural, vital, functions . . . the still-crumbling frame rebuild" (iv. 30–3). If this is true of the circulation of the blood, may it not also be true of the circulation of wealth in society?

Moral Economy

Armstrong's georgic advice to imitate "nature's wise oeconomy" (ii. 133) in all things human extends easily to political economy (Fairer 2003a: 97–8, 192ff.). Dyer's survey of the woolen industry, traditionally the mainstay of the national economy, seeks to discover in the weave of commercial relations the outlines of a moral economy sophisticated enough to reflect the reappraisals of commercial society that were being made by David Hume and the early political economists. Dyer understands the increasing subdivision of labor in manufacture as helping to refine a system of social cooperation, and "luxuries" are viewed as an integral part of a healthy economy. "Luxury" is represented in its benign as well as its malign aspects: items such as tea and imported domestic ornaments are said to be "ill-titled luxuries, / In temp'rance us'd, delectable and good." The "affluent life" sustained by exporting textiles in exchange for "things elegant" is viewed as a social improvement (*The Fleece*, iv. 377–80). As the marketing and consumption of woolens turned on fashion, the example of the textile industry itself confounded rigid moral distinctions between "luxurious" and "necessary" commodities. In Dyer the long "royal mantle" is made from the same material as the short warm coat (iii. 41–3). Above all, Dyer insists that economic behavior should be viewed as part of a *system* no less complex than the universe itself:

The dignity, and grace,
And weal, of human life, their fountains owe
To seeming imperfections, to vain wants,
Or real exigencies; passions swift
Forerunning reason; strong contrarious bents,
The steps of men dispersing wide abroad
O'er realms and seas.
(ii. 619–25)

Dyer adapts Bernard Mandeville's anti-Shaftesburian insight in *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714; Feingold 1978: 113). By stimulating the economy, "seeming imperfections" and "vain wants" promote the common weal. John Barrell and Harriet Guest have described how in Pope's *Epistle to Bathurst* (1732) a Mandevillean "discourse of economic amoralism" is "grafted" on the theodicean discourse of *concordia discors* to "compose a hybrid discourse . . . of economic theodicy" (Barrell and Guest 1987: 124–6). We encounter something similar in Dyer; in fact, georgic lends itself more naturally to such "grafting" than Pope's Horatian mode, in which the moral indignation of some satirical passages may be thought to sit uneasily with the philosophical composure urged in others. Insisting on the divine

sanction of trade, Dyer (himself a "priest") assumes a panoramic view which suggests the sublime perspective of "the CREATOR." Whereas Pope in his moral epistles passes from analytical commentary to satire of individuals, Dyer surveys and moralizes the social prospect, allowing homily to emerge from close description. Georgic comments on occupational groups and narrates historical episodes rather than satirizing the lives of contemporary individuals.

Political Applications

Full synthesis of philosophical satire and georgic awaited Cowper's *The Task* (1785), but Christopher Smart's *The Hop-Garden*, composed in the politically volatile years of 1743–4, is exceptional among georgics in its satirical astringency, revealing the influence of Pope. The rural heroes of Kent, for instance, are contrasted to those who dwell "Politely paralytic in the town!" (i. 169). Smart primarily uses historical episodes as moral instruction, often with a political subtext. Two episodes reveal his "Patriot" hostility to the Carteret ministry which succeeded Walpole in 1742, and his support for the anti-Hanoverian stance of the elder Pitt. The first episode describes how Vortigern, fifth-century King of the Britons at the time of the Saxon invasions, through his "voluptousness" falls prey to Hengist's wiles. In thrall to Hengist's daughter Roxena (Rowena) and weakened by love-potions, Vortigern cedes the Isle of Thanet to the usurping Saxon, who soon gains all of Kent (i. 176–254). In the georgic scale of things, even such catastrophes prove evanescent: "smiling Ceres reassumes the land." Musing on the scene of Hengist's palace walls, long since leveled by "all-devouring time," Smart speculates that "Perchance on them / Grows the green hop, and o'er his crumbled bust / In spiral twines ascends the scancile pole" (i. 252–4). Yet for all these lines' acknowledgment of history's "Gothic" organicism, which suggests regenerative possibilities (Fairer 2002), Smart's message to the Hanoverians hardly seems conciliatory; rather, "we will bury you [too]." His second episode is equally uncompromising. In line with the "Patriot" Elizabethanism (Gerrard 1994: 150ff.) cultivated throughout the poem, the episode draws on the Elizabethan historian of Kent, William Lambarde, who records an (apocryphal) account of the county's resistance to William the Conqueror. In *The Hop-Garden* the free men of Kent – armed and bearing boughs of oak, and led in pastoral procession by "a shepherd swain" who whistles "with rustic notes" – march on William's mercenaries, "The well-fed brigades of embroider'd slaves / That drew the sword for gain" (i. 382–3). When the Kentish heroes shed their green disguises and reveal themselves in all the glory of their "brazen panoply," the Conqueror realizes "how vain would be the contest," and, granting them their native liberties, "like Cæsar, deign[s] to yield" (i. 355–429). William and Caesar are hailed as the "illustrious vanquish'd" (i. 422–3): a lesson, it would seem, for George II. Smart's insistence on viewing Caesar's invasions of Britain in 55–54 BCE as a failed conquest discourages a conciliatory interpretation of the episode, which might have recalled Virgil's account of the resistance to the conquering Trojans of

the ancient Italians and the proud terms of their submission in *Aeneid*, Book XII, or Philips's analogous account of the Welsh Silures who resisted the Romans. As in the poem's first episode, there is a belligerent undertone. Smart's eulogy to Virgil's "great Augustus," whose name is "ever sacred" –

> Sovereign of Science! master of the Muse!
> Neglected Genius' firm ally! Of worth
> Best judge, and best rewarder, whose applause
> To bards was fame and fortune!
> (i. 339–42)

– reads as satirical praise for "Dunce the Second," George Augustus. Smart's hostility to foreign mercenaries reflects the popular outrage in 1743 against the continuance of Hanoverian troops in British service. Smart hopes that "Britannia, in the day of war," will heed Pitt: "Then her oaks / Shap'd by her own mechanics, wou'd alone / Her island fortify" (ii. 287–9). Lamentably, instead of full reliance on such naval "demi-gods" as Vernon and Warren (i. 312–13), British blood is shed "in foreign lands" – "and shed in vain" (ii. 291–2). Smart's poem, which most critics have dismissed as a purely academic exercise, is in fact one of the most politically topical of British georgics. As in Philips's case, it was precisely Smart's bookishness, which the georgic was eminently suited to accommodate, that gave him his nativist political voice in verse.

Geographical Limits

Unlike pastoral, georgic is fundamentally concerned with accurate as well as suggestive geography, in its local, national, and global settings. Smart's precise description of his native county in the image of its rural industry, and his ideological location of a notional Kent on the map of national politics, are modeled on Philips's treatment of Herefordshire. By giving local place references from which readers may trace area boundaries (*Cyder*, i. 67–70), Philips identifies his "Siluria" as coterminous with the province of Archenfield, the ancient Welsh kingdom of Ergyng which Philips calls by its Roman name, Ariconium (i. 173–247). Readers who share the poet's interest in local history will find the geography pregnant. Dyer's "Siluria," or Herefordshire and "trans-Severn England" (Goodridge 1995: 181), is the pastoral–georgic heartland from which all the poem's industrial and imperial energies are imagined to proceed, and an upland vantage point from which a remarkably comprehensive British geography is surveyed. Dyer is especially interested in the communications, notably navigable rivers and canals, that organize the country as a community devoted to commercial traffic. More extensively than Philips's, Dyer's topography is represented as an updated version of Roman Britain, placing special emphasis on the coincidence of Roman and modern routes and junctions (Goodridge 1995; Barrell 1999: 238–45). In Dyer's hands, georgic stresses historical continuities even as the poet explores

contemporary geographical networks in an "improving" spirit, urging his countymen "to teach / The stream a naval course, or till the wild, / Or drain the fen, or stretch the long canal" (iii. 542–4), linking navigable rivers such as the Trent, Severn, and Thames (iii. 604–6).

Dyer's conflation of Roman and contemporary Britain suggests the imperial aspirations realized in his survey of British trade in Book IV. *The Fleece* is a very "Augustan" poem in the sense of being charged with the idea of a providential, universally beneficent British Empire, and also in the sense that its awareness of Rome's historical precedence combines with the self-consciousness that accompanies literary imitation. David Fairer (2002) reminds us that Virgil's *Georgics*, composed shortly before the bestowal of the imperial title, is less a complacently "Augustan" than an expectantly "Octavian" poem. With similarly anxious hopes, British georgic also broods on its own and its culture's belatedness (Goldstein 1977). Critics who represent georgic as sunnily optimistic disregard the shadows accentuating its bands of light.

The Decline of Georgic

The decline of formal georgic after Dyer – and, more interestingly, georgic's continued absorption into other forms, verse and prose – reflects many extraneous circumstances, as well as more purely literary developments, too numerous to discuss here (see "References and Further Reading" below). It is unfortunate, though perhaps inevitable, that discussion of Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* – the surpassing didactic achievement in British georgic – tends to focus on its position as a canonical terminus, and (worse still) on the famous hilarity of its reception by Johnson's circle. Until recent sympathetic readings of the poem (Gilmore 2000; Fairer 2003b), critics since Samuel Johnson have generally deplored Grainger's attempt to incorporate slavery as a georgic topic (Irlam 2001) and smiled at his tendency to court bathos [*see* ch. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"]. Grainger, though highly competent, sometimes lacks poetic tact; and tact was precisely what was needed to introduce the British verse-reading public – which was arguably a good deal warier of the exotic and more fastidious in 1760 than in 1710 – to a Caribbean world represented in lovingly elaborate detail. For this is what Grainger has to offer: a natural history of St. Kitts, the first of its encyclopaedic scope in the literature of the West Indies. The first fifty lines present not only "huge casks" of "strong-grain'd muscovado, silvery-grey," but information about a host of New World trees – "the wild red cedar," the locust, the guava, the guaiac, the shaddock, the "white acajou," the avocado – and their nutritive and medicinal uses. And this is just in the verse, which, uniquely in British georgic, rests on a compendious body of footnotes, many amounting to mini-essays. In the 1764 quarto, as well as Chalmers's 1810 edition, the verse on the page is offset by the sumptuous annotation: the reader is invited to read verse and prose alternately, for reciprocal enrichment. (Today's readers may enjoy the additional benefit of John Gilmore's superb supplementary annotation.) To read *The Sugar-Cane*, then, is to

immerse oneself in a thickly referential textual world. This highlights an essential aspect of georgic, and a main source of its attraction. When we read georgic verse, we engage imaginatively with a massy, bristling record of one man's physical and topical world (until the appearance of Vita Sackville-West's *The Land* in 1926, formal georgic is written by men). The value of any georgic lies in showing how one individual (a) chose to interpret and respond to a specific literary challenge and (b) responded to a variety of topics about which he or she evidently cared a great deal. Georgic is for readers who relish that sense of particularity; it is also for those who like generous explanatory notes and enjoy the kind of quirky, thoughtful topical conversation they ideally evoke.

See also chs. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"; 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 25, "Rhyming Couplets and Blank Verse"; 32, "Whig and Tory Poetics"; 38, "Poetry and the City"; 39, "Cartography and the Poetry of Place."

Author's Note

I am grateful to John Goodridge, David Fairer, and Bridget Keegan for their comments on drafts of this essay.

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30
The Verse Epistle

Bill Overton

Although accepted as an important form in the long eighteenth century, the verse epistle has received less than its due of critical attention. Its neglect may be explained in part by the difficulty of defining it. Unlike most literary forms, such as elegy or pastoral, its subject matter is unrestricted. Most kinds of poem may be written as epistles, including elegies and pastorals; the style and tone will vary as widely as the subject; and any appropriate verse form may be used. A further reason why critics have on the whole neglected the verse epistle is that most of those who wrote in the form, especially during its heyday in the eighteenth century, are now, except for Pope, little known. Examples include John Byrom, John Oldmixon, and Allan Ramsay, all of whom wrote at least as many epistles as Pope, if not more. The fact that the form was so widely practiced is a good reason for studying it, especially when scholars and critics are transforming the canon of the period's verse. Other reasons are the light it casts on eighteenth-century culture and society, including the advances in communications, literacy, social behavior, and publishing that helped promote it. For example, as Karina Williamson points out, "It can scarcely be a coincidence that the beginning of this period saw the foundation of the Post Office in Britain (1660), the rapid development of a nationwide network of postal services, and hence a vast increase in letter writing of all kinds" (Williamson 2001: 76).

Little research exists, however, on the popularity of the verse epistle among writers of the period. Jay Arnold Levine cites two pointers: Raymond D. Havens's remark that "Dryden's *Miscellany* (1684–1709) contains but ten verse epistles, while Dodsley's (1748–58) offers forty-five specimens"; and the fact that the epistolary content of the *Gentleman's Magazine* declined "from a peak of thirty-nine in 1731–40 (the period of Pope's activity) to a low of eleven in 1771–80" (Levine 1962: 658, using statistics supplied by Calvin D. Yost). However, Havens does not state his criteria for identifying epistles, and Yost includes only poems that have the word "epistle" or "letter" in their titles (Yost 1936: 103). One printed and one electronic source provide data on which to base more representative estimates, though even they cannot wholly solve

the problem of identification, which there is not space to explore here. The printed source is David Foxon's *English Verse 1701–1750*; the electronic, Chadwyck-Healey's *Literature Online*. As these have different functions, the information they offer produces different results. In particular, as his title and subtitle indicate, Foxon covers only half of the century and only separately printed poems, while the scope of *Literature Online* is limited by several factors including copyright. Nevertheless, despite these restrictions, Foxon catalogues nearly 10,000 poems, at least 500, or 5 percent, of which may be classified as epistolary; and the "Search Texts" option in the second edition of *Literature Online*, limited to poetry and to the eighteenth century, produced a total of 1,060 poems with the keywords "epist*," "letter," or "letters" in the first line or title. The latter total includes a relatively small number of poems that are not epistles or are duplicates. It excludes, however, the much larger number of poems that are epistles but do not have the keywords in their titles or first lines – the most famous being Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard." Allowing for such omissions, and with a total of 37,901 poems indexed by *Literature Online* as eighteenth-century, it is likely that the proportion of epistolary verse in the database is similar to that in Foxon. By way of comparison, the only kinds of poem that the same search showed as more numerous were the hymn (2,428 poems indexed under "hymn" or "hymns" in their title or first line), the ode (2,387 under "ode" or "odes"), and the song (1,560 under "song" or "songs"). This suggests just how popular a form the verse epistle was. It far outscores, for example, not only the elegy (614 poems with "elegy" or "elegies" in title or first line), the fable (528 with "fable" or "fables"), and the satire (170 with "satir*," 70 with "satyr*"), but even the ballad (660 with "ballad" or "ballads").

Of the two differences mentioned above between poems catalogued by Foxon and those available from *Literature Online*, the more significant is that Foxon lists only those printed separately. In consequence, many of the poems he indexes are occasional or ephemeral, though some – most obviously Pope's – were republished later in collections. A related point is that well over half of the verse epistles he describes were first published anonymously, and in a large number of cases the author remains difficult or impossible to identify. As well as a vital resource for tracking political, religious, and literary controversies of the period, Foxon provides the means to assess how many poems of various kinds were published separately in each of the years he covers. In the case of verse epistles, 35 may be classed as such in 1701–10, 97 in 1711–20, 111 in 1721–30 (with 31 in 1730), 176 in 1731–40 (with 28 in 1735), and 92 in 1741–50. This shows a clear rise and decline in popularity, peaking in the early 1730s when Grub Street activity was at its height. It must again be emphasized, however, that the separately published verse epistle is not necessarily the same kind of poem as one that appears in a collection. It is much more likely to engage directly in contemporary affairs, and its content is more often satirical. The fact that the number of verse epistles catalogued by Foxon decreases after 1740 should therefore not be taken to indicate that the form itself declined at that time. It may point instead to a decline in the market for separately published verse of a topical or satirical kind.

Literature Online provides two further indications of the verse epistle's popularity with eighteenth-century writers. The same search options already specified produced totals of 374 poems out of 48,947 for the period 1500–1699 with the keywords "epist*," "letter," or "letters" in the first line or title, 867 poems out of 142,494 for the period 1800–99, and 850 poems out of 131,575 for the period 1900–99. This means that, allowing as before for the limitations of the search method, the proportion of epistolary poems identified for the period 1700–99 is nearly four times greater than that for the period 1500–1699, and over four times greater than that for the period 1800–1999. The second indication is the number of eighteenth-century writers identified by the search method as having written verse epistles. This is 229, twenty-seven of whom were women.

As resources for studying the verse epistle and other types of poem, Foxon and *Literature Online* are more useful than the English Short Title Catalogue. This is not so much because ESTC, by definition, is confined to works published separately, but rather because it allows only limited searching by genre. Similar reservations apply to Thomson Gale's *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*. *Literature Online*, however, both indexes and contains a large number of poems; and, because these poems are also published on CD-ROM in *The English Poetry Full-Text Database*, they are widely available. The ideal and properly empirical alternative would be to read all the extant verse from the period and record all the epistles. Though such an enterprise is not wholly impracticable – Roger Lonsdale has not only read all the available verse but anthologized it – it is beyond the scope of students and, indeed, of most scholars. The main source for this essay is therefore a database of 867 poems culled from *Literature Online*, with reference to texts from other sources where appropriate. Such a sample is large enough to enable tentative conclusions to be drawn about the nature of the form it represents at the period. Further details about the database and the search methods are provided at the end of this essay.

Verse epistles are normally divided into two main types according to theme and style. The Horatian type is often a verse essay written in a relatively plain manner and addressed to a friend or patron; the Ovidian is a fictional letter to a lover from a mythical or historical figure, often female, and its style is usually more elevated. However, though many eighteenth-century verse epistles follow one of these traditions, many others reach beyond them. This diversity was recognized by John Bell, an early anthologist of the form, who provided 180 examples in the first seven volumes of his *Classical Arrangement of Fugitive Poetry* (1789), grouped as follows: Ethic; Familiar and Humorous; Critical and Didactic; Descriptive and Narrative; Satirical and Preceptive; Panegyrical and Gallant; Heroic and Amatory. Such titles suggest that eighteenth-century poets responded to the variety of Horace's epistles and took it further. The "Ethic" epistles – a term Bell borrowed from Pope – are serious discussions of moral, social, and cultural questions, while those classed as "Familiar and Humorous" exploit the close, easy relations of friends or kin. Developments in the Ovidian form tend instead, as Karina Williamson has shown, to play with voice and gender.

As the verse epistle is an inherently diverse form, and as eighteenth-century writers varied it so flexibly, no attempt to classify it can escape arbitrariness. The following categories are therefore offered not as a model but as a way of illustrating its variety – and all the more so because many epistles cross boundaries. Among the 867 poems in my database assembled from *Literature Online*, the most numerous kind, making up over a quarter of the sample, is the familiar epistle. Next in order of quantity is the Horatian essay-epistle, a form that includes what Pope and Bell called the ethic type, and that, because it addresses all sorts of subjects, is best termed "discursive." This occupies nearly 15 percent of the sample, but it is followed quite closely by a further type for which a new name is appropriate: the dramatic epistle. On the analogy of the dramatic monologue, which it almost certainly influenced, a dramatic epistle is one in which the figure who is supposed to have written it is not the author. Epistles of the Ovidian type fall into this category, but also humorous epistles that mimic a particular style. Mary Leapor's "The Epistle of Deborah Dough" is a good example. Almost as numerous, at over 11 percent of the sample, is the complimentary epistle. Bearing in mind its social and literary importance in the period, complimentary verse deserves more research, especially for the interest of what it has to suggest about patronage. If not addressed to an actual patron, complimentary epistles are usually written to someone else who could benefit the writer – benefit that could be cultural rather than material. For instance, while Joseph Mitchell and Richard Savage certainly sought material help when they addressed epistles to Sir Robert Walpole, and William Collins when he wrote one to Sir Thomas Hanmer, Mitchell could probably have hoped for no more than kudos, as well as sales, from his epistles to the painters Hogarth, Dandridge, and Lambert, and William Hayley from his to Admiral Keppel. Other complimentary epistles honor a friend, like Savage's to Aaron Hill or Mary Robinson's to a woman she does not name.

In obvious contrast to the complimentary epistle is the satirical, making up over 7 percent of the sample. This is a similar proportion to that of the humorous epistle. Both types are, again, best identified according to their primary effect or apparent aim, and both span a wide range. While the target of a satirical epistle may be the government of the day, an individual, or a social practice or fashion, humorous epistles address all kinds of subjects ranging from advice against marriage, as in William Broome's "The Widow and Virgin Sisters," to "trifling," as in James Robertson's "An Epistle to a Friend." Especially toward the end of the century, humorous and satirical epistles tend to merge, as in the many facetious examples produced by Anthony Pasquin (John Williams) and Peter Pindar (John Wolcot). Two other related kinds of epistle are the translation, making up about 9 percent of the sample, and the imitation, making up over 4 percent. The great majority of these translate or adapt epistles by Horace, and they reward attention not only because they show the importance of the Horatian epistle as a literary and cultural model, but also because many are of high quality. In particular, the imitation allowed wide scope for creative and witty updatings of the original, as with the many variations of Horace's fifth epistle, a dinner invitation to Torquatus.

The other types of epistle are equally easily identified but less numerous. Some, because they stem from a specific event, are best called occasional; others are amatory or elegiac; and there remain some that are difficult to classify, among them apologias or exercises in self-defense or vindication. Finally, there is a small group of epistles that have a broadly narrative basis. Among these is a series of eight *Peruvian Letters*, first published under a different title in 1753 and collected in Samuel Whyte's *The Shamrock; or, Hibernian Cresses* (1772). Very freely adapted from Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747, translated 1748), these constitute a rare attempt to reclaim for verse the territory occupied so successfully by epistolary prose fiction after the appearance of Richardson's *Pamela* in 1740. They also illustrate how mixed a form the eighteenth-century verse epistle could be, combining as they do features of the Ovidian epistle (the supposed writer is Zilia, a Peruvian princess addressing her betrothed), the exotic (details of Peruvian culture but also an intelligent outsider's view of Europeans), the sentimental narrative (all the dedicatees were female pupils at Whyte's academy), and the imitation.

A further measure of the variety of the eighteenth-century verse epistle is its elasticity of extent. The length of poems in the sample ranges from two lines, as with Elizabeth Thomas's aptly entitled "Laconick Epistle to Clemena," to over a thousand in the case of Samuel Wesley's "Epistle to a Friend Concerning Poetry." The average extent is perhaps surprisingly long, with 437 of the 867 poems in the sample running to 93 lines or more, and 168 running to more than 200 lines. Less surprising is the fact that most familiar epistles are considerably shorter than discursive, dramatic, or narrative epistles. The exceptions illustrate once more how poets of the period not only exploited but sometimes played against the conventions of the form they chose.

Study of versification offers an additional way of distinguishing among eighteenth-century verse epistles and of understanding how they used formal conventions. The sample's 867 poems give interesting evidence for the dominance of the couplet. Over 82 percent are in one form of couplet or another: more than 55 percent in iambic pentameters, over 22 percent in iambic tetrameters, and a further nearly 5 percent in anapaestic tetrameters. This possibly represents a higher proportion of couplets than in the verse of the period generally, because the couplet had already become, in the work of Donne, Jonson, Dryden, and others, the preferred form for the verse epistle. Only six poems in the sample are in blank verse, but over 12 percent are in stanzas, the most common being quatrains (less than 4 per cent), closely followed by the Scots form of Standard Habby (of which more later). Among the curiosities are one example each of trochaic tetrameter couplets, iambic tetrameter triplets, ottava rima, and doggerel, along with thirty-odd poems in irregular forms.

While the verse form of any poem of value is always important to its effect, it has special significance at a period in which writers were highly conscious of tradition and convention – whether they chose to comply with the norms or transgress them. At one end of the spectrum, a poem in doggerel could only be humorous, as with Swift's "Mary the Cook-Maid's Letter to Dr. Sheridan"; at the other, a poem in numbered iambic tetrameter triplets, the form Isaac Watts chose for "To David Polhill,

Esq.," is very likely to be serious. More subtly, a large range of inflections is possible within such standard forms as iambic pentameter and iambic tetrameter couplets. In the former case, end-stopped couplets, and the patterns of balance, antithesis, and chiasmus that they encourage, are especially fitting for poems that aspire to a serious or elevated tone; while a looser structure to the couplets, and the use of double rhymes with light endings, suit familiar, humorous, or satirical poems. The tetrameter line, on the other hand, is less easily capable of dignity than the pentameter, because it is a foot shorter. This form is therefore much more likely to be chosen for familiar or humorous poems, and it often gains a droll character of its own through comically bad rhymes featuring polysyllables and light endings – as in the form known as Hudibrastics after the poem that used it most famously. Nevertheless, tetrameter couplets are also capable of achieving a serious tone, especially if double rhymes and light endings are avoided. John Dyer and George Lyttelton used such a form for complimentary poems: Dyer in "Epistle to a Famous Painter," Lyttelton in "Letter to Lord Hardwicke." Several poets also used relatively formal tetrameter couplets for amatory poems, including Daniel Bellamy, James Macpherson, and William Stevenson; and some even used them for translations from Horace, for which the preferred form was pentameter couplets, though Christopher Smart was unique in doing so exclusively. Both tetrameter and pentameter couplets are also sometimes varied by triplets or (albeit rarely in the case of tetrameters) by extra feet. Such devices, satirized by Swift at the end of his "Description of a City Shower," are further clues to the kind of effect at which the poet is aiming. They occur most often in forms that invite ostentation, such as complimentary and discursive epistles.

In her brilliant essay on the topic, Karina Williamson argues that, "In terms of its discursive properties, the epistle is in fact more, not less, distinct as a kind than satire, verse essay or lyric" (Williamson 2001: 77). The analogy of the non-literary prose letter is, however, misleading, even though some verse epistles were not intended as "literature" and were written and sent as letters. Many verse epistles do not share the discursive properties of letters, such as salutations, valedictions, set forms of address, or details of time, place, and situation; and not all style themselves as epistles or letters in their titles. It is the complimentary and discursive types that tend to differ most from ordinary letters – a difference marked by the epigraphs, often in Latin, that introduce many, and by the footnotes that accompany some. Jay Arnold Levine draws an apt parallel when he remarks that epistles pretend to belong to private correspondence in the same way that Cecily, in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, calls her diary "simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication" (Levine 1962: 678). But a verse epistle is by no means necessarily the transparent and self-serving fiction this remark suggests. Above all, writing a discursive essay in the form of a letter enables a poet to solve the problem of tone by specifying a particular addressee. As is often recognized, Pope was especially adroit in his choice of supposed recipients. In the four epistles that make up *An Essay on Man* he addressed Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, who had led the active life in government and the meditative as a philosopher; in *Epistle*

to Burlington a leading architect, patron, and connoisseur; and, in a more guileful manner, in *Epistle to a Lady* his longtime friend Martha Blount – guileful in that he exploits her sex and his intimacy with her in a bid to finesse misogynistic views. The mode of address differs according to the subject. As Pat Rogers puts it, in *An Essay on Man* "Bolingbroke's function is to mitigate the loneliness of the long-distance speaker" (Rogers 1975: 64); whereas the tone of *Epistle to a Lady* is more personal and informal, in keeping with the kind of light, playful conversation to which, Pope suggests, women can aspire at their best.

The fact that the tone for such a kind of poem had come to be recognized as a problem is significant. It suggests anxiety over how readers might receive the poet's views – an anxiety related perhaps to social insecurity, or to the uncertainty of the market. Pope, whose status as a middle-class Roman Catholic placed him outside the social establishment, and who was often exposed to satirical attack, had good reason for choosing addressees who were sympathetic to him or in culturally prestigious positions.

Poets lower in the social order had still more reason for caution. An interesting example is James Woodhouse's "Epistle to Shenstone, in the Shades; On reading his Rural Elegance." Given the word "Shades" in its title, and the heading "Written 1784," this is a letter that would have perplexed any post office to deliver, as its addressee had died over twenty years earlier. In the ode to which Woodhouse's title refers, addressed to the Countess of Somerset, Shenstone had assumed that country people enjoyed nature only by thinking of the produce it might yield. Writing more than twenty years after he, as a laboring-class poet, had benefited from Shenstone's patronage, Woodhouse mounts a passionate counter-claim. The poem comes from a period in which he recognized how far patronage had constrained him (Christmas 2001: 187, 195–98), and his choice of a deceased addressee enabled him to protest indirectly and without risk of giving offense. Woodhouse also wrote a series of nine epistles entitled "Love Letters to My Wife," varying in length from 92 to 600 lines. Despite the title, and the early exclamation "A Letter to a Wife! the subject Love!" (Letter I, l. 17), these are not love letters but verse essays on social, moral, and religious questions. As Woodhouse puts it near the start of Letter V, his aim is "The World's Mistakes and Wickedness to scan" (l. 6). The form of verse epistles addressed to his wife Hannah allowed him not only to expatiate at length and over a variety of topics, but to criticize upper-class tyranny and oppression. Like his versification – quite elaborate iambic pentameter couplets, varied by occasional alexandrines – the form is highly artificial, but it provided an acceptable cover for views that might, if expressed more directly, have provoked censure.

Women writers were especially likely to use verse epistles in such a way. Among the 112 poems by Mary Barber in her *Poems on Several Occasions*, a large number may be called epistolary. Significantly, however, Barber did not use the word "epistle" in any of her titles, preferring the more informal term "letter" for the seven directly styled as epistolary; all are occasional poems; and three are identified as written for one of her children. These are strategies characteristic of socially marginal poets of

the period in their efforts to avoid appearing presumptuous – and Barber was trebly marginal as a lower-middle-class woman who was Irish. Her "Conclusion of a Letter to the Rev. Mr. C—" is an especially good example. The poem is less than a whole letter; it is written in the unpretentious form of anapaestic tetrameter couplets, common in humorous verse; and it is ironic at her own expense – especially when she imagines her correspondent fulminating against her as "a verse-writing Wife" (l. 20). Yet the ironies run more than one way. They work against her addressee, whose misogyny she comically exaggerates and then counters by not only describing her own idea of a good wife but telling her son how he should behave as a husband. Nevertheless, though more liberal than the caricature she has attributed to her addressee, the idea of the wife's role she promotes still depends on domesticity, conventional female modesty, and subordination; and, as Christopher Fanning points out, she distances herself from it through quotation (Fanning 2001: 91–3). Like Pope's epistles, this and her other verse letters show the importance of finding an acceptable tone by defining an appropriate addressee (a clergyman friend and, within the letter, her son). But, for her, the difficulties of suiting voice to readership were more acute. Although, therefore, Barber used the verse letter as a form for presenting a woman's voice and perspective, her position as a writer obliged her to practice complex strategies of indirection.

Dramatic epistles provided another way in which poets of the period could exploit the form's potential. If James Woodhouse could write an epistle to someone who was dead, Philip Freneau could assume the voice of a dead writer for his "Epistle from Dr. Franklin (deceased) to his Poetical Panegyrists," Pope could use a canine voice for "Bounce to Fop. An Heroick Epistle from a Dog at Twickenham to a Dog at Court," and Anthony Pasquin could conduct correspondences between a house in Cheapside and a villa at Hampstead, and between Carlton House and Brighton Pavilion. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was especially adept at assuming different epistolary voices, and, as a writer of much higher social rank than Mary Barber, and one who did not normally allow her verse into print, she faced fewer constraints. Two striking examples are "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to her Husband" (not in *Literature Online*, and not published until 1972) and "Epistle from Arthur Gray to Mrs. Murray." Both comment on contemporary scandals. In the first Montagu writes as Mary Yonge to protest against a well-known libertine who, while legally separated from his wife, detected her in a love affair and cashed in by recovering damages from her lover, divorcing her, and remarrying to advantage. As Isobel Grundy remarks, the poem not only attacks the sexual double standard but "broadens out from this particular case to general advocacy for ill-used wives" (Grundy 1999: 240). The epistle is in the Ovidian tradition of a verse letter from an abandoned woman, though it is unusual in that its author was a woman too. The "Epistle from Arthur Gray" goes further. Not only does Montagu cross boundaries of sex and rank to write in the voice of a footman convicted of the attempted rape of his mistress, she crosses boundaries of genre as well. In part the poem is another Ovidian epistle, though the author is a woman and the rejected lover a man; in part it is also a satire. Its obvious targets are the upper-class men who, like William Yonge, "make Love a Trade" and enjoy their lovers' beauties "in a

Strumpet's Arms" (Montagu 1977: ll. 44, 55). But Grundy suggests that the rape charge may have been brought to cover up an affair between Griselda Murray and Gilbert Burnet, that Gray may have aimed to catch the couple in bed, and that Montagu may have known all this. If so, "She was not sympathizing with the proletarian lover, but mocking him as an improbable fiction; she did not blame a rape victim but mocked and goaded a false claimant to chastity" (Grundy 1999: 230). [*See* ch. 13, "LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU, *SIX TOWN ECLOGUES* AND OTHER POEMS."]

One of the letters and two conclusions to letters in Montagu's correspondence are in verse, and others contain verse passages. This was characteristic of a culture in which writing verse was a social accomplishment, and many verse letters were written by people who would not have considered themselves poets. An example (not in *Literature Online*) is a poem by Lady Sarah Dick to Allan Ramsay thanking him for the gift of his poems and an accompanying verse epistle. It begins:

> Dear Allan thanks to you and muse
> Comes from myself and Knight my Spouse
> For your kind canty cosh Epistle
> It warm'd my Heart and made me whistle
> In spite of gloomy gloury weather
> It made my soul as Light as Feather.
> (ll. 1–6, in Ramsay 1951–74: vol. 6, 158;
> "canty" means "merry," and "cosh"
> means "warm" as in "intimate")

This is very clearly a familiar epistle. The fact that Lady Dick does not disdain so ribald a word as "Bums" (l. 21) is strong evidence that she neither expected nor wished it to be printed, and it was not published until the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, her unpunctuated iambic tetrameter couplets, with their comic rhymes and even a triplet, are sprightly, competent verse. The poem attests to the fact that writing verse was a means of amusement and entertainment for many people, not necessarily highly educated and not necessarily with any ambition as poets. Equally interesting is the fact that the epistle by Ramsay to which Lady Dick responded also remained, like others by him, unpublished till long after his death. This indicates that even a poet might write verse epistles that he did not expect to be printed.

Ramsay wrote at least thirty verse epistles, including a fine example to John Gay, and most are familiar. Three that were probably intended both as friendly exchanges and for publication were printed early in his career, along with the verse letters to which they replied, as *Familiar Epistles Between W— H— and A— R—*, and, after several reprintings, they were collected a year or two later in the first volume of his *Poems* in 1721 (Ramsay 1951–74: vol. 1, 115–34). All six are headed with a place-name and date, and most begin with a salutation and end with a valediction. William Hamilton opens the series by praising Ramsay's verse and wishing to be better acquainted, preferably over "a Bottle / Of reaming Claret" ("Epistle I," ll. 45–6, in *Works*, vol. 1, 117). Ramsay replies with equal warmth and in the same stanza

form, praising Hamilton's ability to "hit the Spirit to a Tit[t]le, / Of Standart *Habby*" ("Answer I," ll. 35–6, in *Works*, vol. 1, 119). The first stanza of Hamilton's response illustrates the *joie de vivre* and cordiality that mark this specifically Scots tradition:

> *Dear* RAMSAY,
> When I receiv'd thy kind Epistle,
> It made me dance, and sing, and whistle;
> O sic a Fyke, and sic a Fistle
> I had about it!
> That e'er was Knight of the *Scots* Thistle
> Sae fain, I doubted.
> ("Epistle II," ll. 1–6, in *Works*, vol. 1, 121; "sic a Fyke, and sic a Fistle" means "such a commotion," and "fain" means "joyful")

By the end of the series, Ramsay is giving racy down-to-earth advice on how to live, opining that "That Bang'ster Billy *Caesar July*, . . . Had better sped, had he mair hooly / Scamper'd thro' Life, / And 'midst his Glories sheath'd his Gooly, / And kiss'd his Wife" ("Answer III," ll. 13, 15–18, in *Works*, vol. 1, 131; Ramsay glosses "Bangster" as "A blustering roaring Person," "Billy" as "Brother," and "Gooly" as "A large Knife"). He ends the series by dedicating himself to his friend: "And while my Champers can chew Bread, / Yours — Allan Ramsay" ("Answer III," ll. 95–6, in in *Works*, vol. 1, 134).

The verse form of Standard Habby to which Ramsay refers in his first response to Hamilton goes back to the troubadours of the eleventh century, but owes its name to a comic elegy of about 1640 by Robert Sempill of Beltrees entitled "The Life and Death of Habbie Simson, the Piper of Kilbarchan" (Damico 1975: 208–12). It consists of six lines rhyming *aaabab*, the *a*-rhyming lines tetrameter, the *b*-lines dimeter. Ramsay helped establish it as the stock form for the familiar Scots epistle. [*See* ch. 41, "Poetry Beyond the English Borders".] Although it later became known as the Burns stanza after its most famous practitioner, it was also taken up before Burns by Robert Fergusson, and afterwards by several poets including Robert Anderson, Alexander Wilson, and, in America, Josiah Canning. The beauty of the form is that a single stanza is a suitable length for a thought or a sentence, and its structure of three tetrameter lines, followed by two dimeters with a further tetrameter between them, brings about a change of pace and movement, often with a kind of lilt or skip amplified by the rhyme. Although its compactness – not to mention its technical difficulty – renders it less appropriate for a long poem, it is more limber and capable of greater jauntiness than tetrameter or pentameter couplets. These qualities above all fit it for the familiar epistle, and some of the poems Burns wrote in the form are among his best.

Most discussions of the eighteenth-century verse epistle confine themselves chiefly, like William C. Dowling (1991), to the satirical type and to what Pope and John Bell called the ethic. Although these have obvious literary and cultural importance, the neglected familiar epistle has much to tell about literate social relations at the period

and the role played in them by verse-writing. As a key example of one of the ways in which the epistle was embedded in social context and circumstance, it suggests that an adequate account of the form must consider its full variety.

See also chs. 7, "Poetry, Popular Culture, and the Literary Marketplace"; 8, "Women Poets and Their Writing in Eighteenth-Century Britain"; 25, "Rhyming Couplets and Blank Verse"; 27, "Verse Satire"; 33, "The Classical Inheritance."

The Database of Epistles from *Literature Online*

The first step was to identify poems from the period that might be classed as epistles by using the search methods and terms noted. As the results showed the author's name and dates (in both cases where known), the title of the poem, the source text and its date, they were downloaded and used as the database's foundation. Each item then had to be examined separately. Those that could not be classed as epistles were coded accordingly and other information was added to those that could be so classed: first line, verse form, type of poem, length, century in which written, sex of author, and miscellaneous notes. The resulting database of 867 poems is restricted to those known to have been written in the eighteenth century. It excludes material written before 1700 and published later, but includes material written between 1700 and 1799 and published later. The aim of this restriction was to give priority to the activity of writing rather than those of publication and marketing, though the latter option would also produce interesting results.

It must be emphasized that the total of 867 poems represents only a fraction, albeit a large one, of the verse epistles written in the eighteenth century. Most obviously, it is limited to those included in the versions of the English Poetry Full-Text Database and the American Poetry Full-Text Database available on *Literature Online*; and, although Steven Hall says that the former is "essentially the complete English poetic canon from 600 to 1900" (Hall 1998: 285), it is by no means all-inclusive. Based as it largely is on the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, it does not take full account, for example, of discoveries made by Roger Lonsdale and others, and for this reason it probably underrepresents writing by women. A less obvious limitation, mentioned above, is that the search methods and terms employed identify only poems with the keywords "epist*", "letter," or "letters" in their titles or first lines.

The database was compiled from the second edition of *Literature Online*. Results have not been updated from the third edition because its merging of the search screens Find Works and Search Texts, which were formerly separate, produces too large a number of false hits from searches on terms such as "letters." The third edition has a facility for searching by genre, including the verse epistle. This identifies 751 items for the period.

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PART IV
Themes and Debates

31
The Constructions of Femininity

Kathryn R. King

Femininity is never a simple given. Historically speaking, the feminine has been "constituted of the refuse of masculine transcendence" (Schor 1994: 48), and as such is not a fixed category but rather a catch-all for things not male. As the shadow side of men's lofty self-projections, the feminine tends always toward entropy and chaos. Woman is "matter too soft a lasting mark to bear," as Pope famously puts it (*An Epistle to a Lady*, l. 3), and she therefore threatens always to slide back into more rudimentary states of being – lustfulness and sexual disorder, to be sure, but also madness, self-absorption, triviality, and emotionalism. This relational understanding of femininity, coupled with the idea that woman is by nature more primitive and therefore more irrational, bodily, and sexual than men, gives rise in the eighteenth century to the widely held negative stereotypes described by Felicity Nussbaum in her valuable study of misogynistic satire in the period. Women are vain, inconstant, superficial, affected, susceptible to flattery, and given to self-display. Unwilling to accept their limitations, they pretend to wit and learning and succeed only in looking foolish. In the social sphere their highly susceptible nature propels them regularly into vulgarity, grotesquerie, and malapropism. Their interior lives, especially their thinking lives, are at best a mystery and more reliably a joke (Nussbaum 1984).

These dismissive stereotypes are well known. Yet the fact remains that there are few periods in history when the symbolic feminine is accorded greater cultural power or when gender difference figures more importantly across a variety of discourses. Eighteenth-century poetry abounds with representations of powerful femininity, ranging from the mighty mother Dulness in *The Dunciad* to Britannia herself, symbol of liberty, empire, commerce, global supremacy. As a number of commentators have shown (Barker-Benfield 1992, Guest 2000, and Wilson 2003, to name just a few), over the course of the century British culture and society came increasingly to identify itself with a set of values derived from and tied to constructions of the feminine (refinement, domesticity, propriety, sensibility, and so on), and especially in the second half of the century femininity would come to be associated with ideas of empire and

national identity. This process of "feminization" holds fascinating ambiguities. The feminine can signify British greatness in one moment and, in the next, resistance to British modernity. *The Dunciad* (1742) uses monstrously regressive maternity to embody all that is stupid in modern culture, while poets in the next generation would attach themselves to the feminine to escape the "harsh world of traditionally male history" (Sitter 1982: 131). A radically unstable category, riddled with contradictions and available to diverse uses, the feminine plays a crucial if often paradoxical role in eighteenth-century Britain's understanding of itself. The discussion that follows considers some purposes to which some key poets put ideas of the feminine.

I

Because cultural constructions of femininity have been well covered elsewhere, invaluably in the collections of primary materials and scholarly essays assembled by Vivien Jones (1990, 2000), it may no longer be necessary to delineate aspects of the feminine ideal (passivity, submissiveness, chastity, domesticity, and so on) or detail restrictions on women's status and role, or point to the institutions (law, education, religion, marriage) that secured women's separate and subordinate reality. One might begin instead with an aspect that has received less emphasis: the general sense of the "constructedness" of feminine identity. The modern ideology of innate femininity ("the eternal feminine," "biology is destiny") and gender complementarity ("equal but different") from whose velvet tentacles feminists in the late twentieth century had to struggle to free themselves would begin to take hold only around the 1770s. Earlier in the century, woman is distinguished precisely by her *lack* of any meaningful essence or moral core. According to this older view, woman is an assemblage of looks, gestures, and physical contrivances; a creature of masquerade and performance. In the scathing words applied by Pope to Atossa, she is "Scarce once herself, by turns all Womankind" (l. 116); or, as he says elsewhere in *An Epistle to a Lady*, she is a being equally apt to "sinner it, or saint it" (l. 15). Woman's beauty in particular is a pernicious artifice; female identity a dissemblance and outward show. Small wonder the setting for some of the more memorable poems from the period is a dressing-room or table.

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), in his ironically entitled "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed," offers an extreme but characteristically complex instance of the feminine constructed in his Corinna, a battered prostitute seemingly defined by her "scatter'd" arts and body parts (l. 68). Night-time brings the inevitable disassembly: first the removal of the add-ons – false eye, false hair, false brows, false cheeks, then downward to the improvised rag-brassiere propping up her "flabby Dugs" ("and down they drop": l. 22), the steel-ribbed bodice, the hip bolsters – and then the discovery of the running sores beneath, leaving the reader to contemplate the corruption beneath the constructed feminine surface. This undressing was once thought to project its author's disgust with female flesh and his savage haste to expose female chicanery, but the majority view these days tends to regard it instead as a satire upon the accumulated idealizations of the pastoral tradition. The satire seems, as well, to touch

upon the tendency to identify woman too closely with her femininity. The "dreadful Sight!" (l. 57) that concludes the poem – Corinna's scattered body parts have fallen prey to animals: a rat has dragged her plaster away into his hole, a cat has pissed on her cheek plumpers, and so on – testifies to the almost unbearable insecurities of bodily existence. Corinna's "mangled Plight" (l. 65) is understood not in relation to the male gaze or male desire – not, that is to say, in the context of gender difference – but in relation to the larger created order: gender difference melts into the larger "Anguish, Toil, and Pain" (l. 69) of the human condition. It is on account of such "degendering" exercises as this, perhaps, that so many women readers, as Margaret Doody was the first to show, have found something bracing in what others identify as Swift's misogyny (Doody 1988).

Swift explores the ambiguities of gender construction in other poems, most memorably in the best known of the so-called "unprintables," "The Lady's Dressing Room." The absent Celia is present in the form of noisome bodily residues left behind in the detritus of her private chamber. The important point is not that the beauty Celia takes out into the public world is deceptive, or that female bodily existence is inherently disgusting – although Swift's famously revolting descriptions certainly succeed in making it seem so. (Consider the gummed and slimy towels grimed with "Dirt, and Sweat, and Ear-Wax," or the handkerchiefs "varnish'd o'er with Snuff and Snot," to take just two examples of a great many [ll. 46, 50]). The point, rather, is that Strephon entertains an idea of the feminine that bears little relation to the necessities of actual female existence. So thoroughly has he identified woman with disembodied beauty that he is overwhelmed to discover that Celia shits, and thereafter female bodily existence is tied in his mind to all that is disgusting. (A similar dynamic is at work in Swift's "Strephon and Chloe," although this Strephon takes the opposite mental journey in his good-humored acceptance that his pissing goddess is as "*mortal* as himself at least" [l. 186, in Swift 1958: vol. 2]). "The Lady's Dressing Room" exposes the foolishness of etherealized notions of femininity and urges the more balanced, if still perhaps queasy, reality glimpsed in the speaker's question: "Should I the Queen of Love refuse, / Because she rose from stinking Ooze?" (ll. 131–2). If Swift mocks at once the naïveté of men's idealizations of women and the absurdity of the poetic fictions that turned women into dewy flowers in the first place, the consensus reading for some time now, he also calls attention to the way the Strephons among us end up pinned inside the wreckage of their simplistic understandings of female nature. The extent to which the poem expresses Swift's misogyny remains a matter of debate. [*See* ch. 12, "JONATHAN SWIFT, THE 'STELLA' POEMS."]

Ambiguities of another sort surface in Pope's *Epistle to a Lady*. The irresistibly quotable aphorisms about female nature that crowd this satire on women, the fullest and most complex of the period, have made it the starting point for countless discussions of eighteenth-century constructions of femininity. Where would critics be without "ev'ry Woman is at heart a Rake" (l. 216)? And then there are the neat statement of retiring feminine passivity offered by Pope's alignment of women and the private sphere –

> But grant, in Public Men sometimes are shown,
> A Woman's seen in Private life alone:
> Our bolder Talents in full light display'd,
> Your Virtues open fairest in the shade.
> (ll. 199–202)

– and the brilliantly limned satiric portraits of individual women which show woman to be inconstant, giddy, flighty, fickle, self-centered, self-absorbed, short-lived, child-like, irrational, emotionally disordered, ruled by vanity, tied to a world of glittering surfaces, lacking a moral center or any other interior gravitational force, and incapable (like Atossa) of sustained thought ("No Thought advances, but her Eddy Brain / Whisks it about, and down it goes again" (ll. 121–2). And the poem closes with a strangely contradictory portrait of the feminine ideal – a portrait, inspired by Pope's lifelong friend Martha Blount, that at once desexualizes (she is associated with the moon's "Virgin Modesty" [l. 255]); attributes to her the qualities of a friend, daughter, sister, wife; and in the finish praises her as a "softer Man" (l. 272). This praise that dispraises women generally, combined with the host of confidently condescending generalizations about female character preceding this slippery ideal, has opened Pope to charges of misogyny and made "To a Lady" (along with *The Rape of the Lock*, discussed below) an early target of feminist critique (Nussbaum 1984; Brown 1985; Pollak 1985).

Especially problematic is the portrait of Martha Blount. From one angle the ideal she embodies would appear a welcome blend of opposing qualities of both genders. Like a woman, Martha loves pleasure and has a taste for follies; is reserved, artful, soft, modest, fanciful. Like a man, she desires rest and scorns fools; is frank, truthful, courageous, proud, and principled. The portrait is affectionate, to be sure, but some have thought the poet just a bit too pleased with his (playfully) godlike powers to add a bit of this and a bit of that to produce his own version of Martha (like the first creator he "Shakes all together, and produces – You" [l. 280]). This "You," which has struck many readers as far removed from any actual female person, seems testimony, finally, to Pope's desire to subordinate Martha to his own need for poetic mastery and control. She exists not as a voice, a force, an agent, or an independent self, that is to say, but rather as the poet's own "last best work" (l. 272) in a series of gallery portraits that capture – in this context the verb seems peculiarly apt – female character and put it on display, to the greater glory of the well-satisfied poetic maker. Discomforting too is the characterization of Martha as a softer man, which not only elevates by exemption from the category woman but also recalls the opening pronouncement that female nature is matter "too soft a lasting mark to bear" (l. 3). One is left with the suspicion that the poet's idealized construct, a blending of selected elements, is highly unstable, always in danger of collapsing into the *lack* that is female nature.

II

A striking feature of representations of women in the poetry of the eighteenth century is their insistently specular nature. Whether glittering toast, pox-ruined beauty, or

frightful spectacle, whether she dreads her glass or worships her own reflected image, woman in this verse is first and foremost a reflection, an object in a mirror, or, in a closely related trope, the object of a visual scrutiny – her own, the poet's, the voyeuristic reader's. One need only recall the "cultural fact that a woman 'is' her face and figure, in a way that is never – or never merely – true for a man" to see why the trope of the woman before her mirror should recur in poetry throughout the century, and why women's physical appearance should be an ongoing preoccupation (Doody 2000: 225; see also Greene 1993: 86–97). In his study of gender and taste in the eighteenth century, Robert W. Jones shows that "beauty" is always a contested term in this period: "for some it marked the spectacle women ought to make in society, whilst for others, feminine beauty remained the symbol of corrupting pleasures, appetites which were best avoided and if possible extinguished" (Jones 1998: 7). Beauty is praised and prized in poetry, but is also somewhat suspect. As the name given to one kind of power women are capable of exercising over men, feminine beauty since at least Helen of Troy and, before her, the prostitute in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, has been feared as a threat to male domination and control. In eighteenth-century Britain this threat takes on larger cultural resonances. The beautiful woman, especially as the century wears on, comes to be associated with the appetites and desires tempting the British nation into effeminacy, luxury, or moral collapse; she is a bright, shiny ornament feeding the cultural appetite for consumption, for good or ill. Representations of feminine beauty reflect, then, a deep cultural ambivalence. They are tied up in the issues of male desire, ownership, and control that have been thoroughly explored in feminist criticism and linked as well to the formation of taste, the rise of consumer culture, and emerging notions of national identity (Jones 1998).

Nowhere are the ambiguities of beauty on more ingenious display than in Pope's comic masterpiece *The Rape of the Lock*, a mock-epic battle of the sexes which looks at the phenomenon of feminine beauty from a multitude of shifting perspectives. [*See* ch. 11, "Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* and 'Eloisa to Abelard.'"] Belinda's personal power resides in her incomparable beauty. She is the central object of the gaze – "ev'ry eye was fix'd on her alone" (ii. 6) – and is shown to belong to a universe of lovely objects and airy beings no less visually enchanting than herself (unsurprisingly, since the sylphs once inhabited "Woman's beauteous mold" [i. 48]). But, as many have observed, Pope has it a number of ways. He lavishes all his inventive powers in celebration of Belinda's ravishing beauty, but also invites the reader, with a single word, to smile at her moral and mental vacuity –

> Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
> Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those.
> (ii. 9–10)

– and glories over her in the end by taking poetic possession of the disputed lock after having first moralized, in what many feel is a punitive way, on beauty's insufficiencies: "For, after all the murders of your eye," he reminds her, "your self shall die" (v. 145, 146). Into the mouth of the sensible (but disregarded) Clarissa he puts

the conventional caution against over-reliance on beauty, counseling instead good sense and moral worth:

> How vain are all these glories, all our pains,
> Unless good sense preserve what beauty gains
> . . .
> But since, alas! frail beauty must decay,
> Curl'd or uncur'l, since Locks will turn to grey,
> Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,
> And she who scorns a man, must die a maid;
> . . .
> Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll;
> Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul.
> (v. 15–16, 25–8, 33–4)

This is only the most famous of many statements on the limitations of a merely physical beauty in a beauty-obsessed age. (For other examples see Thomas Parnell's "An Elegy, To an Old Beauty," Swift's Stella poems, and Finch's subtly revisionary "The Agreeable.") Here and elsewhere coquettes are reminded that their power originates in, and dies with, their physical charms.

Preoccupation with the transience of feminine beauty owes something to literary tradition and convention. Since at least the classical era women in lyrical *carpe diem* traditions had been identified with lovely but perishing things like rosebuds (Mary Wollstonecraft would later complain about the "ignoble comparison" between women and flowers; see Guest 2000: 222); poetic forms such as the blazon (or blason) had routinely broken down women into their constituent body parts (a process Swift brilliantly parodies in "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed"); misogynistic satire held up the mirror – literally – to female vanity, as Pope does when he shows Belinda worshipping her own image in *The Rape of the Lock*. Belinda is at once object of devotion and reverential votary in this witty version of the satiric commonplace of female self-absorption: "A heav'nly Image in the glass appears, / To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears" (i. 125–6). Underpinning all these conventions is a sexualizing of women ("the sex") that feminist theory since at least Simone de Beauvoir has analyzed as a projection of men's anxieties about their own sexuality and control. More recent theorists have extended this analysis to explore how what feminist theory has called "the male gaze" (and ways of looking more generally) encodes gendered power relations on cultural as well as psychosexual levels. At a time when many women poets sought to assert the authority of their own perceptions and to create in their writing a space independent of male assessment and the demands of male desire, it is to be expected that their poems would in various ways ironize the trope of woman as object of scrutiny and appraisal.

In the hands of a poet of satiric bent such as Mary Leapor (1722–46) the trope of female specularity turns comically irreverent. Dorinda, the once triumphant beauty tormented by the spectacle of her age-ruined face in "Dorinda at her Glass," seems at

first to offer an occasion for the conventional lesson against "Deceitful Beauty – false as thou art gay" (l. 52). So complete is Dorinda's identification with her now vanished beauty that she regards the face in the mirror as a "Spectre," some "stragg'ling Horror" from the afterworld of the damned, images that at once register and burlesque the destructive force of cultural ideas of beauty (ll. 40, 44). But Leapor does not stop here. The second half of the poem is a rejoinder to all those poetic warnings urging rosebud women to secure a man before her bloom fades. She has Dorinda imagine a female counter-world devoid of the demands of men, fashion, and beauty, a world rich in satiric detail but also somatic pleasures – where Isabel can "unload her aking Head" of curling papers and binding lead (l. 88), where Augusta can throw away her flimsy slippers and put on instead nice thick stockings and sturdy footwear, the better to guard her "swell'd Ancles" from rheumatism (l. 94). In homely detail Dorinda urges her aging sisters to cultivate friendships with other women and learn to be comfortable within their own flesh and spiritual destinies.

Flavia, the speaker of the town eclogue "Saturday. The Small-Pox" by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), is a once celebrated beauty who shuns the image in the mirror. This tonally complex poem, written while Montagu was herself recovering from the face-wasting disease, refuses to moralize the passing of beauty or accede to the supposed compensations for its loss. (Pope and Swift, in their poems to Martha Blount and Stella, propose in youthful beauty's stead the consolations of good sense, good humor, and the attentions of good men such as themselves.) Indeed, the power of this treatment of the loss-of-beauty theme resides in its unrepentant refusal of consolation. In sharp contrast to the briskly upbeat view – "grieve not at the fatal blow," as Mary Jones (1707–78) puts it in "After the Small Pox" (l. 25) – Flavia, with her author's approval, regards a beautiful face as an irrecoverable asset, its disfigurement a legitimate cause for lamentation. Many readers have detected in Flavia's attachment to beauty a critique of the trivial values of fashionable society, but to stop there is to miss Montagu's satire on the hollowness of the "grieve not" strain of poetry and indeed on those compensatory goodnesses enjoined by the likes of Pope and Swift. The sole comfort Flavia is willing to entertain is retirement from public life and power – figured here as operas, circles, toilette, patches, "all the world" (l. 96) – yet this is no conventional withdrawal to a Horatian simple life of quiet virtue and a few good friends, but rather retreat to a place for mourning in perpetuity her "lost inglorious face" (l. 94) and, more importantly, an escape from the eyes of others. In this peculiarly feminine revision of the *locus amoenus*, the "pleasant place" is a site where she will neither view nor be viewed. [*See* ch. 13, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Six Town Eclogues* and Other Poems."]

Closely related to the trope of specularity is the trope that figures women, their faces or bodies or both, as landscapes or prospect-views to be gazed upon, appraised, and appreciated (or not). Prospects in poetry express authority over the landscape (Fulford 1996: 2–6) and by implication authority over the person-as-landscape or prospect-view subjected to the authorizing gaze. Unsurprisingly, then, the trope of woman-as-prospect often turns upon and reinforces cultural constructions of the

feminine as passive, subordinate, and controlled. The speaker of "An Elegy, To an Old Beauty" by Thomas Parnell (1679–1718) chastises a woman in her mid-fifties for fancying she can still please male sight and, in a cruel combination of seasonal and topographical imagery, describes her appearance as a prospect bleak to the eye: "While with'ring Seasons in Succession, here, / Strip the gay Gardens [of her face], and deform the Year" (ll. 19–20). In "Saturday. The Small-Pox" Montagu offers a revision of this trope when she has Flavia recall the days when the face in the mirror offered to her own admiring gaze the pleasures of the prospect:

> Then with what pleasure I this face survey'd!
> To look once more, my visits oft delay'd!
> Charm'd with the view, a fresher red would rise,
> And a new life shot sparkling from my eyes!
> (ll. 9–12)

The female viewer is both landscape and observer gazing in an uninterrupted circuitry of self-pleasure. The trope was so well established that it lent itself to curiously "conceited" uses such as this, in the 1719 poem "The Art of Beauty: A Poem," in which the female face sports purling streams that afford secret joy to its narcissistic viewer:

> Then to the floating Mirrour they [women] retire,
> Act o'er the Lover, and themselves admire,
> Survey the purling Streams with secret Joy,
> And smile with Pleasure as they whisper by.
> (quoted in Chico 2002: 5)

In "Non Pareil," Matthew Prior (1664–1721) uses the face-as-prospect to explore male ambivalence about feminine beauty. Drawing upon the attractions of the countryside – lilies and roses, warbling songbirds, a crystal stream – the speaker creates a Phillis whose physical being affords to his appreciative eye (and ear) the pleasures of the prospect-view: "In Her alone I find whate'er / Beauties a country-landscape grace" (ll. 5–6). But Prior's emphasis falls, finally, upon the vulnerability of the male viewer who senses that Phillis, like the first woman of an earlier and more ominous garden, poses the dangers implied by the closing references to Eve and the poison at the apple's core.

In a body of poetry filled with memorable prospects it is notable that women produced few prospect poems and that such prospects as do appear in their work are to some degree ironized. Male poets, and the male speakers and characters they create, are at liberty to wander the landscape and subject its prospect-views to their commanding, sometimes appropriating gaze. Recall, for example, Pope at the beginning of *Essay on Man* inviting Bolingbroke to expatiate freely with him over the "scene of man," analogized as an expansive field over which they range in search of game (i. 5): they do not hesitate to "Eye nature's walks, shoot folly as it flies" (i. 13) Women, as has been seen, are subjected to the gaze, their own included. They are seen, observed,

watched, scrutinized, desired, admired, envied; scorned for the beauty they lack, chided for taking so seriously those fleeting beauties they do possess. Seldom, however, do they possess the kind of authority that would enable them to take command of the heights or to subdue a man to the status of landscape. Mary Leapor satirically enacts this absence of authority in “Crumble-Hall,” a country-house poem brilliantly imagined from a laboring-class point of view. When the speaker attempts a prospect from the roof – significantly, the leads are described as uncomfortably hot – she is permitted no more than a single couplet of appreciative description before being comically “hurl’d” back into the “nether World” where she belongs (ll. 107–8): to the kitchen where her fellow servants produce butter, tarts, pudding, and jellies. The servant-class speaker-poet returns, that is, to the place where the produce of the landscape is transformed into items of consumption for those who, by virtue of the combined authority of gender and class, are able to enjoy a sustained view of the lands lying beneath them. [*See* ch. 16, “Mary Leapor, ‘Crumble-Hall.’ ”]

III

Roger Lonsdale’s eye-opening Oxford anthology of *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (1989), still revelatory over fifteen years later, shows that women poets throughout the century cocked a skeptical brow at inherited ideas about women. Together, their poems express a complex understanding of female subordination, an understanding that partakes of the larger cultural uncertainty around what one historian has called the “irresolvability of gender’s status as natural or ascribed” (Wilson 2003: 23). On one thing they agreed: too often male authority takes the form of tyranny. This complaint can be traced back at least to Margaret Cavendish (1623–74), in whose “The Hunting of the Hare,” as Donna Landry has observed, the human male behaves “as if all other species were subject to his tyrannical dominion” and that “as women they too are subjected to this human tyranny” (Landry 2003: 236). A similar point is made by Anne Finch in one of her best-known and most admired poems. In the night-time world of “A Nocturnal Rêverie,” which evokes in subtle ways the experience of feminine contingency, the speaker enjoys with the non-human animals a brief “Jubilee” (release) from surveillance and constraint while “Tyrant-*Man* do’s sleep” (ll. 37–8). Admired by Wordsworth for its natural description, the poem has been praised more recently for its muted protest against “male civilization’s brutal ownership of both women and nature” (Doody 2000: 222). In “The Emulation,” the feisty Sarah Fyge Egerton (1670–1723) insists that female subordination in marriage – she calls it “the fatal slavery” – expresses men’s “insulting Tyranny” (ll. 7–8). In an analysis that may owe something to Hobbes, she traces female subjection to male anxiety, envy, and insecurity: fearful that “we should excel their sluggish Parts,” men “keep us Fools to raise their own Renown” (ll. 19, 22). The laboring-class poet Mary Collier (1690?–*c.*1762), in her most important poem, “The Woman’s Labour,” describes woman’s “abject State” as “Slavery” (ll. 41, 14) but traces her subjection to a comprehensive male “scorn” (l. 41) which, over time, has “destroy’d / That happy

State our Sex at first enjoy'd" (ll. 15–16). The past, for all these poets, contains potentialities betrayed by the human male in his Hobbesian drive for supremacy over all things, women included.

The most complex treatment of these themes is found in Leapor's fascinating midcentury poem "Man the Monarch," her double retelling of the Creation story. In the first retelling, female subjection can be traced back to Nature, who as it turns out is a kindly intentioned bungler. Nature intended woman to rule alongside man, and so endowed her with the delicate physical charms meant to constitute her uniquely feminine power: beauty. But in an irony that cuts through the poetic myth of "beauty's awful arms," feminine beauty not only fails to captivate male attention but also renders women too weak to care for themselves. Beauty, "useless and neglected" (l. 37), lacks force and authority; but, cruelly, without it a woman risks being disregarded altogether: wit from "a wrinkled Maid" is "Delirium" (l. 49) In the second retelling, female subjection can be traced directly to the male will to power. Adam, in this account, is the first of a long succession of greedy and power-hungry "Domestic Kings" (l. 65) who cannot bear equal partnership with woman: "He view'd his Consort with an envious Eye; / Greedy of Pow'r, he hugg'd the tott'ring Throne; / Pleased with the Homage, and would reign alone" (ll. 57–9). In an analysis that echoes Egerton's, Adam uses the power of language to name and control as his main instrument of subjection: "And, better to secure his doubtful Rule, / Roll'd his wise Eye-balls, and pronounc'd her *Fool*" (ll. 60–1). Is woman nature's fool or the victim of a masculine despotism that has constructed female oppression? Leapor seems here to hedge her bets in a poem that exemplifies the ambivalence of the century's understandings of gender difference.

The blend of nature and nurture proposed by Leapor at midcentury can be usefully contrasted with the model of innate femininity that underpins "The Rights of Woman" by Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743–1825), from the last decade of the century. At first Barbauld deploys the language of oppression popular among the earlier Augustan women satirists (and recently renewed by Mary Wollstonecraft) and urges "scorned" and "opprest" woman to take up her rightful "empire" (ll. 2, 4). But the final stanza, which invokes the moral authority of feminine sensibility, suggests that the previous claims were ironically advanced:

> Then, then, abandon each ambitious thought,
> Conquest or rule thy heart shall feebly move,
> In Nature's school, by her soft maxims taught,
> That separate rights are lost in mutual love.
> (ll. 29–32)

The essential femininity (the "heart" responsive to nature's "soft maxims") celebrated by Barbauld will serve as weapon of choice in the ongoing renegotiation of gender difference in the next century, when the "claim to mind and domesticity" would come

"at the expense of politics and the sexual promise in sensibility" (Barker-Benfield 1992: xxviii).

Uniting women across the century is the effort to instate women as speaking subjects in their own right, as poets. Egerton heaps scorn on the "scanty Rules" that keep women in their place, declaring that her "daring Pen will bolder Sallies make, / And like my self, an uncheck'd freedom take" ("The Liberty," ll. 2, 43–4). Finch privileges the pen in a famous passage in "The Spleen" in which the "fading Silks" of that most suitable of feminine accomplishments, needlework, yield to the creations of a pen which delights in "unusual things" and pointedly declines to take up that most feminine of symbols, the rose:

> My Hand delights to trace unusual things,
> And deviates from the known and common way
> Nor will in fading Silks compose,
> Faintly th'inimitable Rose.
> (ll. 83–6)

Leapor's verse is filled with ironic self-portraits of the woman poet that comically dismantle all those constructs of women bound up in the imperatives and anxieties of male desire (see Doody 1988; Landry 1990, 2003; Greene 1993; Mandell 1996). Mira, Leapor's poetic alter ego, does not simply fall short of a feminine ideal of bodily delicacy. She affronts with an excess of physicality: she is humpbacked, hugely misshapen, a heap where "Mountains upon Mountains rise!" (l. 56). In "Mira's Picture," the source of this quote, Leapor inserts a deliberately uglified version of herself into the poem and into the masculine line of sight. She enters a figure in the landscape, but one who, far from being a ravishing nymph or lovely songster, is seen to be muttering to herself: a dimly comprehending rustic explains to his companion, a fashionable man of the town, that she makes "your what-d'ye-call – your Rhyme" (l. 34). Her appearance prompts dismissive judgment from the Londoner: she is a blight on the landscape, a "Nuisance" best swept away by the rains (l. 38). Drawing upon familiar masculine prerogatives, he associates her body, derisively, with things in nature: her skin is darker than a rook's; her eyebrows are dry bundles of wood. The insight that the poem's effectiveness rests on a recognition that Leapor is burlesquing "her own appearance but satirizing the gentleman as well, and, in a broad sense, the male gaze" (Greene 1993: 92) can usefully be extended. She also exposes that contradiction at the heart of poetic tradition whereby women are at once etherealized and identified with their bodies. In this inventively deconstructive self-portrait we watch Leapor transforming the image of feminine beauty into terms that release her from femininity's restraints and leave her free to speak as a poet. It is sad to recall that this astonishingly gifted poet died aged twenty-four.

It is often observed that women of the eighteenth century challenge constructions of the feminine simply by writing poems that give voice to their own wishes, feelings, desires. The very act of taking up the daring pen, that is to say, breaks up the

traditional alignment between femininity, passivity, and silence. Some things, to be sure, went unquestioned. Women were not, finally, men's equals. But that left much to be contested, including male claims to absolute authority over wives and daughters; the cultural tendency to confuse beauty and worth, or (contrariwise) to see beauty as a sign of moral vacancy or mere ornamental indolence and frivolity; the reduction of female humanity to the status of landscapes and other objects of scrutiny; and the inevitability of a femininity that, in Roy Porter's words, could be "worn for the gaze of men" (quoted in Greene 1993: 88). As this brief survey has shown, poetry offered spaces for creating or imagining a rich diversity of "femininities" unavailable to women in their everyday social existence or, more to the point perhaps, unavailable in the language and poetic discourses of men. It is one of the remarkable features of the poetry of this period that feminine identity is everywhere under construction. If in the final decades of the century femininity would at last coalesce into a soft but inescapable essence, in its earlier Augustan phases femininity was a fluid category available to a range of appropriations.

See also chs. 8, "Women Poets and Their Writing in Eighteenth-Century Britain"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 11, "Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* and 'Eloisa to Abelard' "; 12, "Jonathan Swift, the 'Stella' Poems"; 13, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Six Town Eclogues* and Other Poems"; 15, "Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, and Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*"; 16, "Mary Leapor, 'Crumble-Hall.' "

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32
Whig and Tory Poetics

Abigail Williams

In an age before the daily newspaper, the broadcast, or the documentary, verse was commonly the vehicle for political comment and argument. Whether we turn to satires lamenting the corruption of the Walpole regime, or panegyric praising the Restoration of Charles II or the victories of the War of the Spanish Succession, we do not have to dig very deep to find an explicit political agenda in much of the verse of the early and mid-eighteenth century. As chapter 1 has shown, the decades between the return of the Stuart monarchy in 1660 and the fall of Robert Walpole in 1742 saw the rise of the first party political literature, and the great era of political verse. This essay will examine the poetry and literary criticism produced during this first age of party in order to consider how far the factionalism of party political debate inflected the *form* as well as the content of eighteenth-century poetry. Can we identify party political aesthetics in this period? How far did political affiliation determine critical evaluations of poetry and literary history in this period? Do Tory poets write different *kinds* of poetry from their Whig contemporaries?

Politics and Poetics

At first glance, the very phrase "party political aesthetics" looks like an oxymoron. The very concept of the aesthetic is often assumed to transcend the historical and political; but this quintessentially post-Romantic idea of the aesthetic serves us poorly in attempting to comprehend the relations between artistic and political spheres in the eighteenth century. Late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poets and literary critics perceived art and politics to be fundamentally interdependent: as we shall see, the close (and often slippery) relationship between the two determined matters as diverse as a poet's choice of genre; the plotting of literary history; and notions of poetic originality and conformity, order and liberty. In a period in which the opposition between Whig and Tory frequently seemed to permeate every area of public

discourse, debates about poetry and poetic form were inevitably marked by contemporary political debate.

We only have to look at the language of eighteenth-century literary criticism to find the idiom of political involvement. Those writers in this period who talked of the "slavery of rhyme," the "restoration of wit," or the "authority of the ancients" were clearly reading literary debates about order and influence through a political paradigm. Analogies between political and poetic matters were frequently articulated through the widespread conceit of the "republic" or "commonwealth" of letters. The act of literary borrowing and allusion was often configured in terms of legitimate and illegitimate authority: critics write of plagiarism as "usurpation"; of "servile imitation" in those who fail to assert their authorial independence. But beyond this linguistic conflation of the literary and the political there were also perceived to be more substantive connections between the two spheres. One of the most famous examples of contemporary comment on the political implications of poetic form occurs in John Milton's preface to *Paradise Lost*, in which he offers an explanation for his use of blank verse, asserting that his poem "is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming" ("The Verse," added to 1668 edition of *Paradise Lost*).

Here Milton makes an explicit comment on the perceived correlation between poetic and political freedom. In rejecting the contemporary fashion for the "bondage" of rhymed heroic couplets, he claimed that his unrhymed iambic pentameters asserted a poetic liberty that mirrored the restitution of ancient political liberties that was central to his republican politics. If we start to think about how the analogy between literary and political form might operate, we can see from this example that some debates about poetics lent themselves to political analogy: in particular, here the restraining force of the rhyming couplet could be contrasted with the comparative freedom of blank verse. Looking more broadly at the poetry and criticism of the period, the discussion of the role of order and regularity in poetry, of adherence to neoclassical rules, is frequently couched in terms of "authority" and laws; and, conversely, the transgression of prescriptive poetic rules could be seen as a form of poetic liberty [*see* ch. 25, "Rhyming Couplets and Blank Verse"].

The trouble with trying to formulate the exact nature of these very suggestive correspondences is that any analogy between political and poetic order risks being invalidated by numerous counter-examples. It seems obvious to assume as a general principle that the defiance of formal and generic convention should signal some sort of political defiance. Yet we should be wary of such an assumption: while, as we have seen, John Milton praises the liberties of blank verse, the republican and, later, Whiggish theoretical commitment to blank verse was rarely manifested in practice. If we look at the poetic pronouncements on the freedoms of blank verse made by Whig poets, we shall see that they are commonly framed in the very "servile" heroic couplets that they purport to reject. It is one of the ironies of the development of poetics in this period that the poet who was most successful in popularizing blank verse was in fact a Tory poet, John Philips. Philips parodied Miltonic verse in his

early works, *The Splendid Shilling* (1701) and *Blennheim* (1705), and with his more serious blank-verse georgic *Cyder* (1708) he firmly established his reputation as "the Milton of his time." As Juan Pellicer has shown [*see* ch. 29, "The Georgic"], Philips's poem about cider-making was profoundly rooted in its author's Tory politics, both in its references to friends and patrons, and in its accounts of English history. Philips's decision to imitate the republican Milton in his choice of form clearly demonstrates the struggle for the appropriation of particular forms and genres in this period: while Whig poets were keen to link Milton's blank verse to ideas of political liberty, Philips showed that Tory poets were also reluctant to lose purchase on a verse form that was increasingly associated with a genuine classical style. Clearly, then, any assumption of a correlation between rhyme form and political ideology is problematic. The argument of this essay is not that certain forms exclusively embodied certain ideological values, but that contemporaries struggled against one another in their reading and practice of poetry to lay claim to, or repudiate, political values.

Panegyric and Satire

The problems that I have been outlining above all concern the notion that verse might operate as a metaphor for political ideology. Yet there are more straightforward relationships between the two spheres, in which we can discern causal links between the position of the poet in relation to the government of the day and his or her choice of poetic genre. To put it in the crudest terms, those who supported the political establishment tend to write panegyrics, verse eulogies on affairs of state or public figures, while those who opposed it wrote poetic satires criticizing the regime and mocking its supporters. In the period we are concerned with here, this is particularly evident in the decades between 1720 and 1740, which saw the political hegemony of the Whig party, in association with the Hanoverian monarchy. There is a large body of poetry by Whig writers in praise of contemporary political life, much of it in the form of elevated panegyric poetry on particular events. Writers like Joseph Addison, Laurence Eusden, and Thomas Tickell wrote odes and heroic verse depicting the Hanoverian monarchs and their military victories in mythological terms. In the decades after the War of the Spanish Succession, writers such as John Dyer and Edward Young celebrated England's burgeoning role in global trade and colonial enterprise in lengthy georgic poems [*see* ch. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"].

In contrast with these enthusiastic declarations of commitment to contemporary public life, the members of the Scriblerian group, chief among them Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and John Gay, were in their different ways opposed to and outside of this Whiggish and Hanoverian political establishment. They tended to write satires lamenting the corruption and inertia of the regime, a response memorably characterized by one critic as "the gloom of the Tory satirists" (Bredvold 1959). While Whig poets were producing official verses to celebrate the glories of contemporary public political life, many of their Tory counterparts writing under the Hanoverians turned

to alternative themes, rejecting celebratory public poetry in favor of oppositional satire or the more private modes of lyric and song. Jonathan Swift's extensive poetic output consists largely of satires, lampoons, and lyrics, while Matthew Prior abandoned the earnest panegyric of his earlier career as a Whig in favor of epigrams, songs, and lyrics. John Gay produced burlesques, ballads, and fables. Pope's sense of himself as a public poet is more complex, shifting over the course of his career from the optimistic and very public pronouncements of *Windsor-Forest* to his assumed role as moral and satirical scourge and commentator in the *Epistles* and *Imitations*. But he too rejected the official role of the poet as panegyrist and mythologizer of the Hanoverian political establishment.

In the works of all these writers, the rejection of elevated "public" poetry becomes in itself a political comment, a refusal to participate in the contemporary affirmation of the political status quo. This is made explicit in Swift's "On Poetry: a Rapsody," where he depicts a sharply divided literary culture within which it is the Whig poet who "for Epicks claims the Bays" while the Tory writes "Elegiack Lays" (ll. 95–6). The poets of the political establishment seem to have captured the genres of heroic poetry, while their opponents, perhaps nostalgically, turn to lyric verse. In "Directions for a Birthday Song" Swift lampoons public poetry by producing instructions to write a panegyric:

> To form a just and finish'd piece
> Take twenty Gods of Rome or Greece
> Whose Godships are in chief request,
> And fit your present Subject best
> . . .
> Your Hero now another Mars is,
> Makes mighty Armys turn their Arses.
> (ll. 1–4, 29–30)

Swift suggests that the official poetry of his contemporaries is so formulaic in its tributes that it could be written according to a series of instructions: all that is required is the standard panoply of classical allusions and mythological comparisons. The seriousness of such eulogistic verse is undercut in the satire both by the comic chimes of the couplets and by the bathetic "arses."

We can see a slightly different approach to panegyric verse in Pope's *Epistle to Augustus*, one of his imitations of Horace. In this, his rendering of the first work in Book II of Horace's *Epistles*, Pope offers an ironic mock-panegyric to George II. Rather than deflating the solemnities of official verse through bathos, the satire works through the implied and unflattering comparison between the present British king, George Augustus, and the Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar. In imitating Horace's sincere lines to his ruler, Pope's compliments to his own king expose instead the monarch's failings [*see* ch. 33, "The Classical Inheritance"]. Although Pope addresses George II as "great Patron of Mankind" (l. 1), the implied point of the comparison between the two men is that while Augustus Caesar was famed for his

support of the arts, George II was criticized for his lack of interest in things cultural. In the final lines, spoken directly to the monarch, the apparently innocuous compliment "Your Country's Peace, how oft, how dearly bought" (l. 397) draws attention to the highly unpopular pacific policy adopted by George II; the lines "How, when you nodded, o'er the land and deep, / Peace stole her wing, and wrapt the world in sleep" (ll. 400–1) remind us of the soporific dulness that Pope had earlier associated with the Hanoverian monarchy in *The Dunciad Variorum*.

Empire and Poesy

Pope's ironic comparison between George II and Augustus Caesar emphasizes one of the most important ways in which politics and literature were seen to be related in this period – namely, in the interdependence of arts and empire. In the *Epistle to Augustus* the malaise of contemporary England is revealed in sharp focus by the contrast with the empire of Augustus, when writers such as Virgil, Horace, and Ovid had flourished under the encouragement and patronage of an enlightened and cultured ruler. Underwriting the comparison is the conviction that bad politics produce bad poetry. It is one of the ironies of Pope's poem that his satires also proved this assumption wrong: for what he and the Tory Scriblerians saw as a regime of mediocrity and philistinism undoubtedly fostered some of the greatest political satire of the century.

Pope's sense of the inadequacy of the Hanoverians compared with the reign of Augustus is a far cry from the optimistic pronouncements of seventy years earlier, at the Restoration of Charles II, when numerous poets, anticipating the revival of English letters under the Stuart monarchy, had proclaimed the birth of a new Augustan age. John Dryden's first panegyric on the accession of Charles II finishes:

> Oh Happy Age! Oh times like those alone
> By Fate reserv'd for Great *Augustus* Throne!
> When the joint growth of Armes and Arts foreshew
> The World a Monarch, and that Monarch *You*.
> (Dryden, *Astraea Redux*, ll. 320–3)

In his employment of the Augustan model, Dryden, like many other Restoration poets, clearly articulates a belief in the symbiotic relationship between empire and poesy. Moreover, in describing the Restoration as a political and an artistic revival, he and other writers gave a cultural dimension to their polemical representation of recent events. The celebration of the regeneration of art and literature after the Restoration was premised on a rejection of Puritan culture. According to Dryden in the *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1668), Restoration culture rose up gloriously from the ruins of Puritan philistinism:

> the fury of a Civil War, and Power, for twenty years together, abandon'd to a barbarous race of men, Enemies of all good Learning, had buried the Muses under the ruines of Monarchy; yet with the restoration of our happiness, we see reviv'd Poesie lifting up its head, & already shaking off the rubbish which lay so heavy on it.

The revival and restoration that the Tory Dryden heralded with the Restoration are sharply contrasted with the ignorance, barbarism, and fury he associates with the Civil War period. Although the English Revolution had produced, and would continue to inspire, some of the greatest works of the century, by Milton, Marvell, and Bunyan, the Augustanism of the post-Restoration period presented this dissenting and republican literature as, to use Dryden's word, little more than "rubbish." Dryden's and his Tory contemporaries' evaluation of their recent literary history was inseparable from their sense of their political history, and the very notion of the Restoration as a new Augustan age for English literature was predicated on a rejection of the Puritan past.

Whig Histories

Fifty years later, in the works of the Whig poet Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, we find a very different account of the development of the national literature. In "Her palace plac'd beneath a muddy road" Montagu describes the progress of English literature from the Reformation, "When Harry's Brows the Diadem adorn," to the advent of Joseph Addison's Spectator in the early eighteenth century:

> When Harry's Brows the Diadem adorn
> From Reformation, Learning shall be born,
> Slowly in Strength the infant shall improve
> The parents glory and its Country's love,
> Free from the thraldom of Monastic Rhimes,
> In bright progression bless succeeding Times,
> Milton free Poetry from the Monkish Chain,
> And Adisson that Milton shall explain,
> Point out the Beauties of each living Page,
> Reform the taste of a degenerate Age.
> ("Her palace plac'd beneath a muddy road,"
> ll. 35–44)

Montagu's account links the reformation of modern poetry not to the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy, but to the Protestant Reformation, and to the Whiggish liberty encapsulated in Milton's blank verse and Joseph Addison's periodical essays on *Paradise Lost*. For her the "degenerate age" is not the Civil War period but the Restoration, here no golden age but an era of debauchery. If the "restoration" of literary and political authority is the key term in Dryden's accounts of the period, in Montagu's poem it is "reformation" that is central to the narrative of poetic development. This reformation is both moral – the correction of the literary abuses of the Stuart Court – and political; Milton's attempt to release English poetry from the "thraldom" of rhyme is represented here, as elsewhere, as the establishment of a form of literary liberty. We can see that with her emphasis on progression and improvement, Montagu is presenting the story of the advancing development of a modern English literature, not

a story centered on the restoration of classical authority. Her emphasis is on a movement away from the "thraldom" of older forms, both religious and literary, toward the freedom of the new.

Liberty and Letters

While Montagu's poem is mainly concerned with the moral reformation of English literature, her emphasis on freedom and progress reflects an emphasis on the native development of liberty and letters found elsewhere in critical writing of the eighteenth century. Rather than dating the heyday of modern letters from the Restoration of 1660, many Whig writers instead saw the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 as the pivotal point in the nation's literary history. They argued that the constitutional freedom of post-Revolution Britain created the ideal political context within which to develop native literary excellence, and they traced a cyclical history of the growth and decline of classical Greece and Rome which they used to demonstrate a correspondence between political liberty and literary achievement. One of the reasons why so many Whig writers were convinced of the link between political liberty and literary excellence was because of the influence of the Greek theorist Longinus' influential treatise on the sublime, *Peri Hupsous* [*see* ch. 37, "THE SUBLIME"]. Longinus' theories of poetic process were rooted in the concept that great writing could flourish only with political freedom, a concept that was to provide the basis for the longstanding perception that great poetry – and in particular, the sublime – was intrinsically linked to political liberty.

As early eighteenth-century Whig writers saw it, the recently established freedoms of the English constitution heralded a period of literary excellence, and we can trace the influence of this belief in the interconnection of liberty and letters through to mid-eighteenth-century poetry and to Mark Akenside's long poem, *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744). Throughout the *Pleasures*, the glories of freedom are extolled in relation to civic virtue and patriotism, and in Book II in particular Akenside asserts the interdependence of aesthetic process and political order. He describes the unstringing of the Muses' lyre under despotism, and then the revival of letters and liberty:

> Each muse and each fair science pin'd away
> The sordid hours: while foul, barbarian hands
> Their mysteries profan'd, unstrung the lyre,
> And chain'd the soaring pinion down to earth.
> (ii. 15–18)

> But now, behold! the radiant æra dawns
> When freedom's ample fabric, fix'd at length
> For endless years on Albion's happy shore
> In full proportion, once more shall extend
> To all the kindred pow'rs of social bliss
> A common mansion, a parental roof.

> There shall the Virtues, there shall Wisdom's train,
> Their long-lost friends rejoining, as of old
> Embrace the smiling family of arts,
> The Muses and the Graces.
>
> (ii. 42–51)

We see here that some of the rhetoric formerly used to celebrate the Restoration of the arts in 1660 is now being employed to articulate a Whiggish political agenda. Where the Tory Dryden had associated literary barbarism with the republicanism of the 1640s and 1650s, in the Whig Akenside's poem it is the decline of classical republicanism and the ensuing despotism of monarchical rule that represent the unstringing of the lyre by "foul barbarian hands." The "radiant era" for Akenside is not the new Augustan age of the Restoration, but the period ushered in by the post-1688 constitution. Order, or "proportion," and virtue are the products of the political settlement established at the Glorious Revolution.

Akenside's belief in the transition of liberty and letters from classical Greece and Rome through to modern Britain was a theory that found expression in the early and mid-eighteenth-century "progress poem." Works such as Samuel Cobb's "The Progress of Poetry" (1707), Judith Madan's *Progress of Poetry* (1721), and James Thomson's *Liberty* (1735–6) represent a popular genre that offered a politico-historical account of Western literature. In tracing liberty's westward movement from classical Greece and Rome through to modern Britain, the progress poem provided a narrative of cultural development that seemed to confirm that British arts would flourish under the present constitution. By the mid-eighteenth century this theory had become something of a commonplace. Yet it had also become a source of concern. In "The Progress of Poetry" (1757), Thomas Gray describes a fairly familiar story, the flight of the Muses from first Greece, and then Rome:

> Every shade and hallowed fountain
> Murmured deep a solemn sound:
> Till the sad Nine in Greece's evil hour
> Left their Parnassus for the Latian plains.
> Alike they scorn the pomp of tyrant-power,
> And coward Vice that revels in her chains.
> When Latium had her lofty spirit lost,
> They sought, oh Albion! next thy sea-encircled coast.
>
> (ll. 75–82)

Yet although Gray, like so many others, identifies England as the new home of political liberty, his conviction of the mutuality of political and poetic progress has none of the confidence of earlier writers. Gray's progress poem does not end with the generically conventional triumph of contemporary verse. We have instead a sense of the evanescence of the poetic muse, as the speaker laments "Oh! lyre divine, what daring spirit / Wakes thee now?" (ll. 112–13). One can see a similar loss of faith in the

idea of poetic progress in William Collins's "Ode on the Poetical Character" (1747), a poem which again seems to emulate the progress genre in tracing the English poetic tradition through Spenser and Milton, but yet concludes with the dramatic announcement of the speaker's failure to follow Milton's visionary poetics: "My trembling Feet his guiding Steps pursue; / In vain" (ll. 71–2). Where earlier eighteenth-century poets had proudly heralded the advent of the brave new world of liberty and letters, we can see in the poetry of Collins and Gray a suspicion that the sophisticated culture of modern Britain might not be the place to find the Muses. As contemporary historians and philosophers developed their understanding of the history and culture of primitive societies, mid-eighteenth-century writers began to look to the poetry of those earlier "ancient" cultures in an attempt to understand, and recapture, the most primal sources of poetic power. Increasingly, the sources of poetic inspiration were more likely to be associated with primitive cultures. Collins's *Oriental Eclogues* (1757), his *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands* (written 1749–50, published 1788), and Gray's "The Bard" (1757) all offer explorations of alternative, much earlier poetic traditions in which inspiration and poetic vision could still be found. Within a few years James Macpherson and Thomas Chatterton would attempt to recover genuine ancient poetry by reconstructing or fabricating the voices of the past, in the form of the poems of Ossian and the manuscripts of Thomas Rowley. This late eighteenth-century enthusiasm for poetic primitivism signaled the death knell for the progress poem, which had been rooted in the conviction that the development of civilization and that of poetry were coterminous.

It could be argued that in the examples cited above we have seen the poles of critical opinion about poetry in this period: the Tory poems emphasize the need for the restoration of order, the Whigs the desire to free literature from the "chains" of formal convention. They bring us back to the question of the actual correlation between the ideological and the aesthetic. Trying to formulate some general principles based on the analogy between ideological and aesthetic stance, we might expect that Whig poetry, with its emphasis on liberty, would promote freedoms in poetic form, while Tory poetry would stress order and custom in form. So how far do these associations operate in the literature of the period?

Poetic Originality and the Whig Sublime

As I have argued, many Whig writers were convinced that the Revolution of 1688 marked a decisive moment in the establishment of modern political liberty. Not only did they believe that it would produce a rebirth of native literary culture, they also claimed that the Revolution demanded literary modes that would reflect its radical implications. The influential literary critic John Dennis argued for the need for new poetic forms to free English literature from the cultural hegemony of the pagan ancients. He believed that the future of contemporary poetry lay in the Christian sublime. In his critical essay *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704) he argued that, by

developing a tradition of religious verse, modern writers could surpass the triumphs and the effects of classical literature. For Dennis and other Whig writers such as Joseph Addison and Richard Blackmore, Milton's *Paradise Lost* provided an example of just the sort of new freedoms to which poets and critics aspired. Milton's grand style took his verse far beyond the contrived fancy they associated with the Royalist and Tory poets of the seventeenth century such as Cowley or Waller, and the Christian subject matter of the poem provided concrete proof of a sublime accommodated to the culture of early eighteenth-century Britain. For most early eighteenth-century poets, however, the impulse toward the Christian sublime did not result in lengthy biblical epic. As David Morris has described, the extensive body of elevated religious poetry of this period took the form of shorter works: odes and hymns based on biblical paraphrase; eschatological accounts of the Last Judgment; descriptions of the attributes of God; and imaginative devotion (Morris 1972).

Modern religious verse was seen by some as an appropriate reflection of modern political liberty because it freed English poetry from the pagan authority of the ancients. However, it was not necessarily the subject matter of the Bible that Whig poets wanted to emulate. They also wanted to produce poetry that would create in the reader some of the lofty elevation, the overwhelming sensation associated with the poetic sublime. Many Whig poets thought that the particular circumstances of post-Revolution Britain were ideally suited to sublime poetry, not merely because of Longinus' association between liberty and the sublime, but also because, as they saw it, the great victories of the 1690s and 1700s offered examples of awe-inspiring feats that were almost beyond comprehension. The sublime enabled them to express their sense of awe and astonishment at the heroism of contemporary political and military history, as in Joseph Addison's celebrated depiction of the Duke of Marlborough at the Battle of Blenheim, frequently acclaimed as one of the great moments of sublimity in modern verse:

> So when an Angel by divine command
> With rising tempests shakes a guilty land,
> Such as of late o'er pale *Britannia* past,
> Calm and serene he drives the furious blast;
> And, pleas'd th' Almighty's orders to perform,
> Rides in the whirl-wind, and directs the storm.
> (Addison, *The Campaign* [1705], ll. 287–92)

The sublime offered an aesthetic mode that could be seen as the stylistic embodiment of liberty. With its emphasis on affect, its rejection of formal harmonies in favor of transcendent expression, and its privileging of poetic genius, the sublime seemed to offer a break with the formalism and neoclassical servility that Whig writers associated with traditions of earlier verse.

However, the Whiggish emphasis on the rejection of poetic tradition and formality was complex. The sublime represented aesthetic freedom, and this was often figured

in terms of a freedom from the constraints of neoclassical imitation. Yet the literary criticism of Dennis, Addison, and Blackmore drew on the authority of classical ideas and examples of sublimity to explore this concept of poetic freedom. And the Whiggish "rejection" of classical models was also complicated by the pervasive use of classical allusion in the period. Poets might have argued that modern verse could now rival classical epic because of the magnificence of its subject matter and style, but in evoking classical comparison they also established the framework of literary achievement against which readers should measure their verse. Classical and earlier native literature were both sources of authority, yet this authority was thought to be rendered redundant by the events of modern life, and this dualism complicates notions of poetic "originality" in the period.

Neoclassical Order

As we have seen, Whig writers emphasized the need for new, "original," sublime poetry to reflect the changed circumstances of public life. The rejection of the constraints of neoclassicism was seen as a blow for literary liberty. Such ideas appear in some contrast with the emphasis on order and authority in Tory poetry and literary criticism of this period. Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711), a poetic treatise on the art of writing good literary criticism and good poetry, has long been seen as an influential example of the importance of poetic decorum in this period. Pope's *Essay* surveys the art of criticism, relating his discussion of matters of form, tone, and content back to the prescriptions and examples of classical authors. In advising his readers to "Learn hence for Ancient Rules a just Esteem; / To copy Nature is to copy Them" (ll. 139–40), he reminds his readers that even the author of the immortal *Aeneid* learnt that the best way to tap "Nature's Fountains" was through the example of the great master, Homer. Poetic power is thus attained not through an independent exercise of the imagination, but through an assimilation and imitation of the literary values of ancient Greece and Rome. The emphasis here and elsewhere in the *Essay* suggests the political connotations of this argument: as Pope sees it, it is the "rules" and order and rationality of the classical world that provide the most appropriate model for modern poetry. At the centre of this neoclassical aesthetic are matters of inheritance, order, and restoration.

Elsewhere we find more explicitly politicized criticism of the excesses of inspired verse. In "Concerning Unnatural Flights in Poetry" (1702), the Tory and Jacobite writer George Granville exposes the perceived political implications of the sublime. He attacks the writers

> Who, driven with ungovernable fire,
> Or void of Art, beyond these bounds aspire,

> Gygantick forms, and monstrous Births alone
> Produce, which Nature shockt, disdains to own.
> (ll. 13–16)

> Such frantick flights, are like a Mad-mans dream,
> And nature suffers, in the wild extream.
> (ll. 57–8)

Granville's suggestion here of unnatural aspiration betrays the social dimensions of poetic ambition, and the "monstrous," "ungovernable" quality of elevated poetry suggests the transgression of an established political order that shocks Nature herself. The sublime was a concept that clearly bore a range of ideological resonances: while some saw it as a form of poetic superlative, capable of encapsulating the wonder of divine creation or the magnitude of heroic achievement, it could also, as here, suggest social transgression and the collapse of political order.

The elegant reason and order privileged by Tory critics such as George Granville and Pope certainly seems to run counter to the emphasis on irregularity, on excess, and on the transgression of the known boundaries of poetic experience that was central to Whig definitions of the sublime. It is not hard to see why some critics have argued that the distinctions between the "irregularity" of Whig poetry and the "regularity" of Tory poetry form the basis of party political aesthetics in the eighteenth century (Kliger 1952: 3–6). However, just as Whig poetry reflects a complex approach to notions of poetic freedom and originality, there is also substantial evidence of interest in sublime or elevated poetry in early eighteenth-century Tory writing. [*See* ch. 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm."] Although in his neoclassical *Essay on Translated Verse* the Earl of Roscommon praises a "strict harmonious Symetry of Parts" and cautions poets to "Avoids Extreams," he also aspires to poetic elevation:

> Hail, mighty *MARO*! may that Sacred Name,
> Kindle *my Breast* with *thy caelestial Flame*;
> *Sublime Ideas*, and *apt Words* infuse.
> The *Muse* instruct *my Voice*, and *Thou* inspire the *Muse*!
> (ll. 173–6)

The references here to celestial flames, sublime ideas, and inspiration suggest Roscommon's attraction not to a poetry of order and reason but to one of grandeur and elevated flight. As he argues, the classical inheritance does not preclude fire and sublimity in modern verse – rather, it is through the inspiration of Virgil that contemporary poets can strive to create their own lofty works. Such interest in the sublime can also be found in Pope's *Essay on Criticism*. Alongside the attraction to Horatian conversation and visions of Aristotelian order, we can also see Pope's enthusiasm for the rapturous mode of the Longinian sublime. This is most clearly encapsulated in his famous praise of the critic who can "From *vulgar Bounds* with *brave Disorder* part, / And *snatch* a *Grace* beyond the Reach of Art" (ll. 155–6).

The clearest evidence of Pope's own attempts to achieve such poetic affect are found in his "Messiah" (1712), a "sacred eclogue." In "Messiah" Pope fuses Virgil's fourth eclogue with the Book of Isaiah, offering a Christianized reading of Virgil's enigmatic prophecy of the birth of a child. The poem begins with the lofty invocation: "Ye Nymphs of *Solyma*! Begin the Song: / To heavn'ly Themes sublimer Strains belong" (ll. 1–2). In invoking the nymphs of Jerusalem rather than the conventional maidens of pastoral, Pope announces his emphasis on sublimity rather than mere delight, arousing an expectation of poetic flight supported by his declared rejection of "Mossie Fountains and the Sylvan Shades" (l. 3). The poet is here no urbane man of the world, but a visionary bard, "rapt into Future Times" (l. 7). But we might also identify Pope's use of the sublime in a more unlikely genre – the mock-epic of *The Dunciad* (1728–43). In *Peri Bathous* (1728) Pope had compiled a prose satire that took the form of a series of witty assaults on all those aspiring and failing to attain the poetic sublime. We can read *The Dunciad* – whose genesis lies in *Peri Bathous*, and which is also a satire on failed, predominantly Whig, writers – as an alternative sublime. In *The Dunciad* Pope uses images of chaos and darkness to conjure some of the negative associations of social and artistic disorder that, as we have seen, were also part of the contemporary conceptualization of the sublime. The famous final lines of the poem present a vision of cultural apocalypse:

> Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS is restor'd;
> Light dies before thy uncreating word:
> Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
> And Universal Darkness buries All.
> (iv. 653–6)

They are lines that bear many of the hallmarks of the poetic sublime – the vision that cannot easily be visualized; the sense of a universal, incomprehensible power; and the failure of language, with "the uncreating word." As we have seen, the evocation of chaos had been central to earlier constructions of the sublime, whether in the form of eschatological verse or in the barely controlled violence of Addison's depiction of the Duke of Marlborough in battle. In those earlier poems, this disorder is offset by the controlling figure of God or a military leader; but in *The Dunciad*, which prophesies and laments a total cultural apocalypse, the controlling figure behind the chaos is Dulness herself. Pope has transvalued the sublime: in exploiting its potential to evoke visions of destruction, he offers a powerful inversion of his contemporaries' use of the sublime to affirm and celebrate the achievements of modern Britain.

Once again, we can see that the literary criticism of the period is marked by competing claims for the appropriation of a particular poetic mode. Rereading eighteenth-century poetry and literary criticism in this way, as part of the politico-cultural discourse of the period, reveals how far political difference shaped contemporary thinking about the literary past; about the relationship between political context and literary achievement; and about poetic innovation and authority. In gaining such a

historical awareness of the rules and values through which poetry was read and judged, we can start to see that political and aesthetic concerns were inextricably linked in both the positive and the negative evaluation of poetry in this period.

See also chs. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"; 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"; 17, "Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination*"; 25, "Rhyming Couplets and Blank Verse"; 33, "The Classical Inheritance"; 37, "The Sublime."

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33
The Classical Inheritance

David Hopkins

Eighteenth-Century English Poetry and the Classics: An Overview

Educated eighteenth-century English culture was permeated at every level by the art, history, mythology, philosophy, and literature of ancient Greece and Rome. School and university curricula were dominated by the study of classical (and particularly Latin) texts, in ways that had changed little since the Renaissance. Schoolboys and undergraduates were drilled not only in classical poetry, philosophy, and oratory, but also in the historical, geographical, medical, mathematical, and legal lore of the ancient world. Figures from republican Rome attained the status of cult heroes among the English ruling classes. Eminent politicians and landowning grandees had themselves sculpted in the manner and garb of virtuous Romans. Young aristocrats and gentlemen on the Grand Tour visited the monuments of Rome and Pompeii and brought back with them physical relics of the classical past. (Travel to Greece became more common as the century progressed.) Parliamentary speakers modeled their orations on those of Cicero and Demosthenes. The country's great landscape gardens were adorned with Greco-Roman temples, their grottoes sporting statues of classical river and sea deities. Portrait painters depicted their female subjects in the guise of classical goddesses and the Muses. The architecture of country houses imitated Vitruvian practice and design. Operatic plots regularly drew on ancient myth. Periodical essays were prefaced by quotations from the Roman poets. And a burgeoning print culture was making available the majority of ancient literature in translation for those whose Latin and Greek were rusty, or who had been denied by social status or gender the classical education enjoyed by the largely moneyed, largely male elite.

Eighteenth-century poetry affords abundant evidence of the larger culture's saturation in the classics. Some of the period's major poets devoted their best energies to the translation and imitation of classical verse. Many of the century's major poetic genres (pastoral, georgic, satire, ode, verse epistle), and its poetry of scientific specu-

lation and rural retirement had their direct roots in classical practice. Others (burlesque, mock-heroic, the country-house poem) depended more obliquely yet no less certainly on classical precedent. Eighteenth-century literary criticism drew constant comparisons and connections between classical and English verse, sometimes – as in the period's numerous poems on the "art of poetry" – imitating the form and manner, as well as echoing the concerns, of the Greek and Roman critics. Popular poetic and dramatic works such as Joseph Addison's verse drama *Cato* (1713) took their subject matter from classical history and myth. And, as a glance at the notes in any scholarly edition will confirm, the presence of Greek and Roman history, legend, and literature is everywhere visible in eighteenth-century poetry in the form of allusion, echo, and passing reference. When providing examples for imitation by trainee poets, the poetical commonplace books of the period presented an indiscriminate juxtaposition of classical and English examples.

Pre-eminent among the direct translations from classical poetry in the period were Alexander Pope's versions of Homer's *Iliad* (1715–20) and *Odyssey* (with collaborators, 1725–6). Both went through numerous editions before the end of the century and won admirers in all sectors of the literate population. In his *Iliad* Pope was thought to have effected a major literary miracle: a living re-creation, in an entirely "natural" and plausible-sounding English heroic idiom, of the greatest poem in the world. He had, many of his contemporaries believed, made the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* integral parts of English literature, thus performing the same service for Homer that Dryden had for Virgil in his rendering of 1697. Later in the century, when blank verse was increasingly preferred to the heroic couplet, Homer was retranslated in that medium by William Cowper (1791). Virgil continued to be read in Dryden's version, but was also translated (into blank verse) by Joseph Trapp (1718–20) and (into couplets) by Christopher Pitt (1740). Lucan found a worthy translator in Nicholas Rowe, whose *Pharsalia* (1718) was described by Samuel Johnson as "one of the greatest productions of English poetry," successfully capturing Lucan's "philosophical dignity" and emphatic moral assertiveness "comprised in vigorous and animated lines" (Johnson 1905: vol. 2, 77). During the first half of the century, Horace was available in a composite version by poets of Dryden's school (1715, expanded 1721), and in reprints of Thomas Creech's serviceable Restoration rendering (1684). This was replaced as the standard English Horace in midcentury by that of Philip Francis (1742–3). Later versions of Horace included that of Christopher Smart (1767). Juvenal continued to be read in the version by Dryden and others (1692, dated 1693), a version which had no serious eighteenth-century rivals. The rendering of Lucretius by Thomas Creech (1682) was reissued, elaborately annotated, in 1714. Sir Samuel Garth's composite version of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, combining Dryden's translations with renderings by poets of the younger generation (including Addison, Gay, and Pope) appeared in 1717 and went through many editions. There were also numerous reprints of the composite versions of *Ovid's Epistles* (1680) and *Ovid's Art of Love* (1709). Other versions of classical poetry included renderings of Anacreon and Sappho by John Addison (1735) and Francis Fawkes (1760), of Catullus by John Nott (1795), of Claudian's *Rape of*

Proserpine by Jabez Hughes (1714), of Martial's *Epigrams* by James Elphinston (1782), of Phaedrus' *Fables* by Smart (1765), of Pindar's *Odes* by Gilbert West (1749; enlarged 1753), of Propertius' *Elegies* by Nott (1782), of Tibullus' *Elegies* by James Grainger (1759), and of Statius' *Thebaid* by William Lillington Lewis (1767).

Direct translations were complemented by "imitations" of classical verse, in which the situations and personages of the original were replaced by analogs from the modern world. Such versions sometimes followed the structure and logic of their originals closely, merely using contemporary examples to convey the meaning and relevance of the ancient text to modern readers with greater clarity and directness. Others redirected the original in ways that reflected their authors' own interests and preoccupations. Samuel Johnson's *London* (1738), for example, transformed Juvenal's Third Satire into a moving portrayal of the plight of the impoverished writer in eighteenth-century London, incorporating barbed commentary on the corruption of the Walpole government. The same writer's *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) metamorphosed the opportunistic scorn of Juvenal's Tenth Satire into a stately and sober Christian meditation on human ambition and delusion. [*See* ch. 18, "SAMUEL JOHNSON, *LONDON* AND *THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES*."] Other imitations stood in a yet more subtle relation to their originals, entering into a complex dialog with the classical text – of which independent knowledge was assumed, and which was often printed, or cued by line-references at the foot of the English version – in which meaning was generated from a dynamic exchange between the English poem and its "source." Such a technique reaches its apogee in Pope's *Imitations of Horace* (1733–8), in which various of the Roman author's satires, epistles, and odes are deployed by Pope in a complex and ever-changing process of self-discovery, self-fashioning, and self-vindication (see Stack 1985).

Eighteenth-Century English Poetry and the Classics: Debates and Dilemmas

Ubiquitous as it was, the presence of the classics in eighteenth-century English poetry – and in eighteenth-century culture more generally – was, and remains, a focus of controversy. The late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century "Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns" (also known in England as "the Battle of the Books" – the title Swift gave to his satire of 1704) centered on whether ancient accomplishments in philosophy, science, and the arts should be regarded as absolute ideals, never to be surpassed, or whether modern writers and thinkers should strike out on their own, independent of classical precedent. The more extreme Moderns cast their opponents as nostalgic reactionaries who were both insufficiently respectful of recent literature and scholarship, and inadequately attentive to the historical "otherness" of ancient cultures (see Levine 1991; Patey 1997). The Ancients retorted that much modern scholarship was mere pedantry or modishness, that much modern literature was incompetent, dull, and venally motivated, and that an admiration for antiquity did not necessitate slavish

genuflection and inert copying. Such arguments continued as the century progressed. The earlier eighteenth-century preoccupation with the classics, its critics maintained with increasing insistence, was grounded in a belief in timeless human values and unchanging human nature which was inadequately attentive to cultural difference and to the radically transforming processes of historical change. It also betrayed creative insecurity, and masked an essential lack of the "original genius" which, some now argued, constituted the only legitimate basis of literary greatness. [*See* ch. 34, "AUGUSTANISM AND PRE-ROMANTICISM."]

This trend, it should be emphasized, represented only one strand in a complex web of critical opinion, and for a long time coexisted with much enduring respect for earlier poetic classicism. Works like Pope's *Iliad* continued to be reprinted in popular editions, and were widely read throughout the literate population. But by the end of the nineteenth century the eighteenth-century handling of classical literature seemed substantially outmoded. Its reverence for classical precedent smacked of Frenchified rule-mongering. Its translations seemed decorous and "artificial" cuttings-down of their Greek and Roman originals to the size of the Age of Elegance. The scholar Richard Bentley's reported reaction to Pope's *Iliad* ("A very pretty poem, Mr Pope, but you mustn't call it Homer") now seemed merely a self-evident truism.

Such attitudes have remained surprisingly resilient to this day. A number of excellent specialist studies, to be sure, have offered positive revaluations of the aesthetic foundations of eighteenth-century poetic classicism. Such work has demonstrated the sensitivity, creativity, and intelligence with which the best writers of the period engaged with the literature of Greece and Rome. It has illuminated the subtle blend of similarity and difference which the eighteenth-century poets discovered in their classical precursors – a stance far removed from the naïve "essentialism" with which they have been sometimes charged (see Brower 1959; Erskine-Hill 1983; Knight 1951; Mason 1972; Rosslyn 1980, 1990, 1997, 2002; Shankman 1983; Stack 1985; Tomlinson 2003). But, despite all this endeavor, the classicism of eighteenth-century poets remains uncongenial to many modern readers. In particular, the translations that formed such a central part of their project are nowadays mostly unread. The complete text of Pope's *Iliad*, for example – a work which most eighteenth-century readers would have automatically included among the supreme poetic masterpieces of the age – is not even currently in print. It gets no consideration on most literary courses, and no discussion in most student introductions to Pope's work.

Various factors seem to have conspired to produce this situation. Many modern readers feel at sea when confronting a world of classical myth and history in which they have no training or experience. And, despite the insistence of so much recent literary theory on the textually "constructed" nature of perceived reality, a vulgar-romantic aesthetic of "personal expression" still informs much common thinking about poetry, militating against the appreciation of work of such obvious intertextual "literariness" as that of the eighteenth-century classicists. On both counts, the late Philip Larkin probably spoke for many when, after declaring his conviction that nowadays "the whole of classical and biblical mythology means very little," pronounced that poems come

"from being oneself, in life," rather than "from other poems" (Larkin 2001: 20, 54). Eighteenth-century classicism is, moreover, often regarded as suspect on political and ideological grounds. Ian Watt's still influential *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) campaigned for the early (middle-class) novelists' emphasis on "truth to individual experience" in the face of a supposed (elite) classicizing emphasis on "general human types" and "general truths" (Watt 1957: 9–34). And there has been a persistent tendency – no doubt reinforced by the continuing association of classical learning with educational and social privilege – to identify eighteenth-century classicism with a "gentry" culture, fighting a rearguard action against the more "progressive" tendencies of its age.

Nor has there been much support for the eighteenth-century translators of the classics from a quarter whence one might have expected it: modern classical scholarship. For if students of English literature have been reluctant to read these versions because they are insufficiently "original," professional classicists have – with a few distinguished exceptions – neglected them because they depart too regularly and too radically from the literal meaning of their sources. For some "translation theorists," such departures reveal the eighteenth-century translators' desire to "colonize" or "appropriate" their originals, overriding the "otherness" of the Greek or Latin texts in an attempt to "accommodate" them to their own ethical and aesthetic norms (see Venuti 1995). In such accounts, Bentley's quip (quoted above) acquires a further lease of life.

Some truth must be conceded to the hostile modern view of eighteenth-century classicism. The paraphernalia of classical art and learning were, indeed, sometimes used in the art and literature of the period in merely inert, conventional, and ideologically oppressive ways. Some of the classical allusions in eighteenth-century minor poetry are merely routine and predictable displays of learned lumber acquired in the course of a genteel education. And some of the period's translations may fairly be described as weakly derivative exercises in the mode of Dryden, Pope, or Milton.

But the classical engagement of the period's best poets is of an altogether different kind. In such work, the modern poet stands in an active, dialogic relationship with his classical source, using his encounter with a poetic peer or with styles and forms from a "foreign" culture to nourish and revitalize the native tradition, and extending his own imaginative vision by internalizing and articulating sentiments and perceptions derived from the distant past. In re-creating the imaginings of their ancient predecessors, the greatest eighteenth-century poets were simultaneously discovering potentialities in themselves and making those potentialities available to their readers. Philip Larkin's "being oneself, in life," such poets realized, far from guaranteeing superior creative integrity, can all too easily involve imprisoning oneself in the tunnel vision of one time, one place, one personality, and one literary tradition.

The creativity of the best eighteenth-century poetic classicism is visible both in direct translations and imitations of classical originals, and in works which are more obliquely based on ancient styles and forms. By way of illustration, let us briefly consider examples of all three types of writing, taken from the work of a single poet: Alexander Pope.

Refashioning a Classical Genre: "Eloisa to Abelard"

Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" records the imagined thoughts of Eloisa, writing from the convent of the Paraclete to her former tutor and lover Peter Abelard, himself now living in monastic retirement. Pope's main source was John Hughes's English translation (1713), via the French, of the extant Latin correspondence between the two lovers. Pope's recasting of this celebrated medieval love affair in the form of one of Ovid's *Heroides* – a set of fictional verse letters from celebrated heroines of Greek mythology – constitutes both a creative reworking and an implicit critique of its classical model. In his preface to the Restoration translation of the *Heroides*, *Ovid's Epistles* (1680), John Dryden had drawn attention to the delicate and searching nature of Ovid's depiction of the passion of love, but had also noted the somewhat knowing and modish way in which Ovid had "Romaniz'd his *Grecian* Dames," writing "too pointedly for his Subject" and making "his persons speak more Eloquently than the violence of their Passion would admit: so that he is frequently witty out of season: leaving the Imitation of Nature, and the cooler dictates of his Judgment, for the false applause of Fancy" (Dryden 1956–2000: vol. 1, 114, 112). Indeed, a notable feature of the *Heroides* is the way in which Ovid's deft recasting of familiar stories allows the reader a sophisticated knowingness about the heroines' emotions which goes beyond the perceptions of the women themselves. In his version of Canace's report of her incestuous passion for her brother Macareus, Dryden had extended this feature of Ovid's collection by adding witty strokes (marked in his text with inverted commas) that invite the reader to speculate on Canace's feelings during the act, and to entertain a prurient superiority toward her half-regretful, half-gloating reminiscences:

> Forc'd at the last, my shameful pain I tell:
> And, oh, what follow'd we both know too well!
> "When half denying, more than half content,
> "Embraces warm'd me to a full consent:
> "Then with Tumultuous Joyes my Heart did beat,
> "And guilt that made them anxious, made them great."
> ("Canace to Macareus," ll. 37–42)

Dryden's knowing tone, and the neat antitheses by which it is conveyed, were immediately spotted and shrewdly parodied by the minor wit Matthew Stevenson:

> When half denying, half contented
> We met in full, and full consented;
> Then what with Joy, and what with that
> Of guilt, my heart went pitty-pat.
> ("Conace to Macareus,"
> ll. 51–4, in Stevenson 1680)

In "Eloisa to Abelard" Ovid's characteristic antitheses are deployed to quite different effect, to render with absolute seriousness the tumult of Eloisa's sufferings:

> I ought to grieve, but cannot what I ought;
> I mourn the lover, not lament the fault;
> I view my crime, but kindle at the view,
> Repent old pleasures, and sollicit new:
> Now turn'd to heav'n, I weep my past offence,
> Now think of thee, and curse my innocence.
> Of all affliction taught a lover yet,
> 'Tis sure the hardest science to forget!
> (ll. 183–90)

Eloisa's feelings expressed in her "sad" and "tender story" (l. 364), Pope makes clear in the final lines of the poem, are ones with which he feels a sense of close personal identity, and had rendered with wholehearted empathy.

During the course of the poem Eloisa attributes her woes to an irresolvable conflict between love and religious commitment. But the ultimate balance of her arguments, and of the poem as a whole, falls decidedly in favor of love. In "Palamon and Arcite," Dryden's version of Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," Arcite had depicted love as a formidably amoral force which overrides all human laws, sanctions, and obligations:

> Each Day we break the Bond of Humane Laws
> For Love, and vindicate the Common Cause.
> Laws for Defence of Civil Rights are plac'd,
> Love throws the Fences down, and makes a general Waste:
> Maids, Widows, Wives, without distinction fall;
> The sweeping Deluge, Love, comes on, and covers all.
> (i. 331–6)

And Dryden's translation of Lucretius' passage on love in Book IV of *De Rerum Natura* had stressed the futility of lovers' agonized and delusory strivings to attain physical unity and satisfaction:

> For Love, and Love alone of all our joyes
> By full possession does but fan the fire,
> The more we still enjoy, the more we still desire.
> ("Lucretius . . . Concerning
> the Nature of Love," ll. 50–2)

Pope's Eloisa echoes the terms of both passages, but vehemently rejects their negative implications, defiantly proclaiming her unrepentantly single-minded commitment to Love's laws:

How oft', when press'd to marriage, have I said,
Curse on all laws but those which love has made!
Love, free as air, at sight of human ties,
Spreads his light wings, and in a moment flies.
Let wealth, let honour, wait the wedded dame,
August her deed, and sacred be her fame;
Before true passion all those views remove,
Fame, wealth, and honour! what are you to Love?
The jealous God, when we profane his fires,
Those restless passions in revenge inspires;
And bids them make mistaken mortals groan,
Who seek in love for ought but love alone
. . .
When love is liberty, and nature, law:
All then is full, possessing and possest,
No craving Void left aking in the breast:
Ev'n thought meets thought ere from the lips it part,
And each warm wish springs mutual from the heart.
(ll. 73–84, 92–6)

Pope's rendering of Eloisa's predicament answers precisely to Dryden's description of Ovid's capacity to provoke the reader's "concernment" with a heroine "in the violence of her passions" (Dryden 1956–2000: vol. 1, 54), while avoiding the artful "placing" of his speakers that, to more tender-hearted readers, seemed like frigidly masculine condescension. "Eloisa" was applauded throughout the eighteenth century for its "improvement" of the Ovidian epistle in a more passionately inward and full-blooded direction. Pope, Joseph Warton believed, had earlier translated Ovid's epistle of "Sappho to Phaon" with "faithfulness and with elegance" which "much excels" any of the versions in the 1680 collection. But that translation was, in Warton's view, itself far excelled by "Eloisa," the story of which was "more proper" than any other "to furnish out an elegaic epistle" (Warton 1782: vol. 1, 299, 311). Samuel Johnson overcame any uneasiness he may have felt at the potential blasphemy of some of Eloisa's sentiments to praise Pope's poem for having "excelled every composition of the same kind" (Johnson 1905: vol. 3, 105). And Oliver Goldsmith considered "Eloisa to Abelard" "superior to any thing in the epistolary way" (Barnard 1973: 456). [*See* ch. 11, "ALEXANDER POPE, *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK* AND 'ELOISA TO ABELARD.'"]

The Dynamics of Imitation: The *Epistle to Augustus*

The early eighteenth century is still regularly described as the "Augustan" age of English literature. M. H. Abrams summarizes the common view, noting that "the leading writers of the time . . . themselves drew the parallel to the Roman Augustans,

and deliberately imitated their literary forms and subjects, their emphasis on social concerns, and their ideals of moderation, decorum, and urbanity" (Abrams 1999: 214). Such an account is seriously misleading. First, many of the classical poets translated, imitated, and echoed in the period were not "Roman Augustans" at all. Several of them, moreover, are conspicuously notable for their *lack* of "moderation, decorum, and urbanity." Eighteenth-century English attitudes to Roman Augustanism, moreover, were themselves far more complex and various than Abrams implies, a Tacitean hostility to Augustus-the-tyrant coexisting with positive admiration for the Emperor's achievements as peacemaker and cultural patron (see Erskine-Hill 1983; Weinbrot 1978).

Of all the Roman Augustans, Horace might be thought to be most accurately characterized by Abrams's description. But Horace was himself a controversial figure, being admired by some for his Socratic combination of familiar wit and philosophical profundity, and excoriated by others as a self-serving and ethically inconsistent flatterer (see Stack 1985: 3–17; Weinbrot 1978: 120–49). Consequently, Horace's complex ironies seemed to some to emanate from a poised self-awareness which undermines complacency and dogmatism, while to others they betrayed a shallow worldliness and suave sycophancy. In his *Imitations of Horace* Pope shows his awareness of both traditions, adding his own layers of irony to create a voice which is neither simply "Pope" nor simply "Horace," but the product of a complex and ever-shifting dialogue, in which the Roman poet is sometimes invoked as an ally, sometimes regarded at a more quizzical distance, and sometimes used as a stalking-horse for highly subversive commentary on the cultural politics of Pope's own day.

The first in Book II of Horace's *Epistles* is a direct address to Augustus, in which the poet canvasses his emperor's support for contemporary work which, Horace maintains, surpasses that of the earlier Roman poets in its refinement and elegance. Horace's tone is genial and intimate. Extravagant eulogy is tempered and complicated with an assertive self-confidence which emboldens Horace to offer Augustus forthright advice and to criticize aspects of the Greek literature which the Emperor so loved. Horace also deploys witty self-deprecation to insinuate disarming doubts about the very modern poetry for which he is campaigning. The nuanced familiarities of Horace's tone are utterly transformed by Pope, who addresses his *Epistle to Augustus* to King George II (George Augustus), a monarch renowned for his philistinism, and for the favors he bestowed on third-rate poets and corrupt politicians. Horace's opening praise of Augustus' military triumphs is transformed by Pope into a piece of savage sarcasm which depends on the reader's perception of how inappropriately the Horatian eulogy fits the modern monarch: the seas, Pope's readers would know, were far from "open" at the time (English merchant ships were frequently harassed by Spanish cruisers); and George's excursions "in Arms abroad" were not military expeditions, but prolonged, and much resented, visits to his mistress in Hanover.

While You, great Patron of Mankind, sustain
The balanc'd World, and open all the Main;

Your Country, chief, in Arms abroad defend,
At home, with Morals, Arts, and Laws amend;
How shall the Muse, from such a Monarch, steal
An hour, and not defraud the Publick Weal?
(ll. 1–6)

When, later in his poem (ll. 245–7), Horace, whose text Pope prints opposite his own, explicitly praises Augustus' good literary taste, the English "equivalent" of the Roman sentiments is clearly signaled – by an obtrusive blank space.

But Pope has not merely hijacked Horace's epistle for the purposes of harsh opposition satire. The central section of the poem, in which Horace charts the evolutionary development of Roman literature from its primitive beginnings to its present refinement, is recast and extended by Pope as a retrospective review of English poetry, in which the writer deploys his Horatian persona to reflect on his own great predecessors, blending generous praise with delineations of his precursors' weaknesses so acute that they have reverberated throughout later critical discussions. His famous lines on Milton's God have no direct equivalent in Horace:

Milton's strong pinion now not Heav'n can bound,
Now serpent-like, in prose he sweeps the ground,
In Quibbles, Angel and Archangel join,
And God the Father turns a School-Divine.
(ll. 99–102)

And Horace's reflections on the spirited but rough-hewn and under-revised Roman attempts to imitate Greek tragedy are applied to more distinguished writers nearer home:

But Otway fail'd to polish or refine,
And fluent Shakespear scarce effac'd a line.
Ev'n copious Dryden, wanted, or forgot,
The last and greatest Art, the Art to blot.
(ll. 278–81)

In the *Epistle to Augustus* Pope both aligns himself with Horace, seeing, and developing, modern analogies in the spirit of Horace's pocket history of Roman poetry, and simultaneously distances himself from his model, powerfully asserting the vast gulf between the opportunities afforded respectively by ancient Rome and modern London for a poetic culture supportive of and protected by the ruling powers. Pope's use of Horace is complex. He speaks with the voice of an Ancient authority to assert the merits of Modern verse, while simultaneously signaling the decadence and corruption of Modern, as against Ancient, civilization. His poem rests, therefore, not on any simple identification of ancient and modern worlds, or on an assertion of the blanket superiority of the former over the latter, but on a subtle sense of

difference-in-similarity. If Rome and London are, in some senses, very close, they are also, in others, worlds apart. Pope gains a new perspective on his own culture by partially inhabiting a vantage point outside that culture. Such a process involves a cross-cultural dialogue that Pope knows (the most exquisite irony of all) the poem's addressee couldn't begin to understand.

Translation and "Nature": Helen of Troy in Pope's *Iliad*

The standard criticism of Pope's *Iliad* has been that, rather than faithfully rendering the Greek, Pope merely assimilates Homer to the "polite" social and religious norms of eighteenth-century England and to latinate ideals of epic decorum. Such criticisms are often illustrated by a handful of famous instances: the "elevation" of the fly to which Menalaus is compared into a hornet (xvii. 642–5); the "dignifying" of the ass to which Ajax is likened (xi. 682–9); the assimilation of Homer's Zeus (i. 726–35) to Milton's God. But such examples give a very misleading impression of Pope's translation as a whole. For while Pope sometimes modifies Homer's earthy realism and verbal directness to make the Greek poet more amenable to stylistic expectations derived from Virgil and Milton, he also leaves intact the greater part of Homer's narrative, much of which, we may remind ourselves, deals with remorselessly brutal slaughter on a distant, heroic battlefield, a scenario as remote as is conceivable from any eighteenth-century drawing room, ballroom, or library. And if Homer's Zeus is sometimes momentarily aligned with Pope's own God, there are many parts of the poem where his activities, and those of the other Olympians, are very far removed from anything conceivable within the Christian dispensation. Throughout his translation, Pope responds vividly to the "animated Nature" of Homer's epic narrative, summoning up a constant stream of English eloquence to match the "sublime" "fire" with which the Greek poet has rendered his incidents and characters.

In the act of translating Homer, Pope mobilizes and expresses a far wider range of religious, ethical, and psychological sympathies than were available to him from within his own culture. He offers, for example, a remarkably uncensorious presentation of Homer's proud and irascible hero, Achilles, marking him out, surprisingly, for special admiration for the "Air of Greatness" he displays just before one of his most appallingly brutal acts: the slaughter of the trembling suppliant Lycaon (xxi. 84n.; see further Clarke 1981: 136–40; Rosslyn 1980; Shankman 1983: 3–51). Rendering Homer was, for Pope, both an exercise in scholarly exploration of an alien culture and an encounter with "Nature": the great unseen reality in which all human beings participate, but which is normally hidden from their view, unless revealed by great art. The full glory and horror of the human condition, Pope was convinced, had been revealed more completely and variously in the Homeric epics than in any other single literary source. That fact, rather than these works' antiquity or fame, constituted their permanent claim on human attention. As with Virgil before him, when Pope read the *Iliad*, "*Nature* and *Homer* were, he found, the *same*" (*An Essay on Criticism*, l. 135).

Pope's conviction of the depth and range of Homer's revelation of the human condition is nowhere more apparent than in his rendering of the passages in Book III of the *Iliad* depicting the plight of Helen, the Spartan queen whose abduction to Troy by Paris had been the cause of the Trojan War. Near the beginning of Book III, Helen is summoned by Iris to witness the single combat between her husband Menelaus and Paris. She is discovered at her loom: "The golden Web her own sad Story crown'd, / The *Trojan* Wars she weav'd (herself the Prize) / And the dire Triumphs of her fatal Eyes" (ll. 170–2). Pope's "fatal" (l. 172) has multiple resonance: Helen's beauty is fat*ed* by the gods (she was given to Paris as his reward for judging Aphrodite the fairest of goddesses); it has caused many deaths on the battlefields of Troy; and it exerts a goddess-like spell over all that see her.

Iris' summons awakes Helen's "former Fires" (l. 184), which encompass more than merely her passion for Menelaus: "Her Country, Parents, all that once were dear, / Rush to her Thought, and force a tender Tear" (ll. 185–6). Pope's note on the passage conveys his sense of the compassionate understanding of Homer's depiction:

> The Reader has naturally an Aversion to this pernicious Beauty, and is apt enough to wonder at the *Greeks* for endeavouring to recover her at such an Expence. But her amiable Behaviour here, the secret Wishes that rise in favour of her rightful Lord, her Tenderness for her Parents and Relations, the Relentings of her Soul for the Mischiefs her Beauty had been the Cause of, the Confusion she appears in, the veiling her Face and dropping a Tear, are Particulars so beautifully natural, as to make every Reader no less than *Menelaus* himself, inclin'd to forgive her at least, if not to love her. (l. 165n.)

"There is scarce a word" spoken by Helen, Pope affirms, "that is not big with Repentance and Good-nature."

The reader's feelings for Helen are confirmed by the reaction of the elders of Troy,

> Chiefs, who no more in bloody Fights engage,
> But Wise thro' Time, and Narrative with Age,
> In Summer-Days like Grasshoppers rejoice,
> A bloodless Race, that send a feeble Voice.
> (ll. 199–202)

These old men, who have every reason to curse Helen, find themselves marveling at her spellbinding beauty:

> They cry'd, No wonder such Celestial Charms
> For nine long Years have set the World in Arms;
> What winning Graces! what majestick Mien!
> She moves a Goddess, and she looks a Queen!
> (ll. 205–8)

When Helen encounters Priam on the battlements, he generously absolves her of blame for their plight:

> No Crime of thine our present Suff'rings draws,
> Not Thou, but Heav'ns disposing Will, the Cause;
> The Gods these Armies and this Force employ,
> The hostile Gods conspire the Fate of *Troy*.
> (ll. 215–18)

But Helen cannot accept Priam's exonerating words. Her sense of guilt and shame at her betrayal of her country and "Nuptial Bed" (l. 230) is so intense that she will, she says,

> mourn, 'till Grief or dire Disease
> Shall waste the Form whose Crime it was to please!
> (ll. 233–4)

In Priam's words and Helen's reply, Pope is responding eloquently to the "double motivation" which, as modern scholarship has revealed, is so essential to Homer's presentation of the human lot (see Lesky 1999). Helen's position is, from one point of view, indeed "fated": she had been, from the moment of Paris' arrival in Sparta, a plaything of the gods. But this does not, in her own eyes or in the reader's, exempt her from a profound sense of personal guilt. Her plight is that of the archetypal tragic protagonist, "both an agent and one acted upon," simultaneously "guilty and innocent" (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: 32).

Helen's vulnerability to Aphrodite's power is underlined later in the book, when the goddess compels Helen to bed with Paris, now rescued from the battlefield and returned to his chamber in Troy. Helen's "secret Soul" is moved with passion for Paris "unawares to herself" (l. 497n.). But once she recognizes the presence and working in her of the divine power, she rejects Paris, delivering a bold protest against the laws by which she must live. Despite her courageous protest, however, she must obey Aphrodite's bidding. For, as the goddess makes clear to her, her survival depends on the preservation of the very beauty that has been her undoing:

> Obey the Pow'r from whom thy Glories rise:
> Should *Venus* leave thee, ev'ry Charm must fly,
> Fade from thy Cheek, and languish in thy Eye.
> Cease to provoke me, lest I make thee more
> The World's Aversion, than their Love before;
> Now the bright Prize for which Mankind engage,
> Then, the sad Victim of the Publick Rage.
> (ll. 514–20)

Pope responds fully, in both text and notes, to Homer's tragic conception of Helen's plight. Helen, he sees, is constrained by iron laws as binding as those which afflict

the male heroes of the *Iliad*. She is also endowed with a similar self-knowledge and eloquence. In re-imagining and re-presenting Homer's portrayal, Pope is offering his contemporaries an image of womanhood far removed from the trivializing condescension to "the fair sex" to be found, for example, in the pages of *The Spectator*. By recreating Homer's portrayal in vibrant and moving English verse, he has deepened and extended his contemporaries' sense of both the dignity and vulnerability of human existence. Such an achievement is characteristic of eighteenth-century poets' engagement with the classics at its best.

See also chs. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"; 11, "Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* and 'Eloisa to Abelard'"; 18, "Samuel Johnson, *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*"; 26, "Epic and Mock-Heroic"; 27, "Verse Satire"; 28, "The Ode"; 34, "Augustanism and Pre-Romanticism."

Author's Note

This chapter was written during the tenure of a British Academy Research Readership (2002–4).

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34
Augustanism and Pre-Romanticism

Thomas Woodman

It will be obvious to most readers that there is a significant difference in style and tone between the best early eighteenth-century poetry and that of the canonical Romantics. It will also be apparent that this difference is somehow symptomatic of the vast, fascinating and crucial changes in European consciousness during the course of the eighteenth century. What is much more difficult is how to account for or even chart this change in British poetry without considerable oversimplification. For many years an orthodox chronological explanation held sway: the idea that the correct and classical "Augustan" poetry of the early century was gradually replaced in the mid- and later century by a melancholy and imaginative poetry of nature that heralded the full flowering of the Romantic period. The increasing refinement and professionalization of literary studies and of critical theory has deconstructed this account. It has come to be recognized that all such periodizations involve deep-rooted preconceptions and prejudices, often of a specifically ideological nature.

This particular narrative has come to seem more suspect than most. The formulation of early eighteenth-century poetry as "Augustan" has been described as meaningless by D. J. Greene (1970: 91). Even those critics who may preserve the term find that "Augustan" restricts our sense of this poetry and sends out the wrong signals about the "daring muse" (Doody 1985) of this "Age of Exuberance" (Greene 1970). Such a feeling was intensified after Roger Lonsdale's anthologies, *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse* (1984) and *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (1989) revealed the huge variety of authors, styles, and subjects in the published and previously unpublished verse of the century. The term "Pre-Romantic" has been criticized even more strongly, although it is still to be found in naïve use and also in bold revisionist form in a powerful book by Marshall Brown (1991). Ultimately, though, the word implies that we view some very disparate and fascinating poets solely in the light of their proposed anticipation of what was to follow them. Finally, of course, the concept of Romanticism has itself been recognized as problematic in recent years, with the growing acknowledgment of the female poets of the time and

the understanding that the Romantic movement grows out of as well as rejects the Enlightenment.

Yet a chronology, even a three-phase pattern of early, middle-to-late, and end-of-the century, stubbornly seems to insist on itself, whatever terms we use to describe it. It is a logical flaw prevalent in academia to believe that to point out an exception to a generalization, or even a series of exceptions, is to disprove that generalization. But if there are generalizations that sweep individual particulars away with them, there are others that can serve as conceptual tools to help us define individuality. Chronology has its place, and it does not disprove conventional accounts of Restoration literature, for example, to point out that Milton published *Paradise Lost* in 1667. In succumbing to the inevitability of narrative in this essay I have tried at the same time to do justice to the individuality of some very strikingly individual poets.

Augustanism

The idea of a privileging of qualities such as refinement, correctness, and politeness in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is not simply an ideological construct of literary critics and historians, although it has often been overgeneralized. The process was seen in the period itself as relating to the necessary rebuilding and consolidation of English society after the trauma of the Civil Wars. This included a reaction against the religious zeal that had fueled the wars and a celebration of moderation and politeness, much-needed qualities in the development of the new public sphere of the eighteenth century. This incorporated both the urban space of coffee-houses and visible sociability, and the more symbolic space in which a new sense of public opinion was created and expressed. The prestige of English science also contributed to the sense of enlightenment from the superstition and fanaticism of the past; but the alliance of Newtonian science with religion reminds us that there was no simple "secularization," as a modern sociologist might see it. [*See* ch. 3, "Poetry and Science."] In poetry, politeness meant "polish" and refinement in distinction from the extravagancies of the past, a polite intimacy of tone that preserved something of the earlier relationship between writer and audience in the new marketplace, and a special ease of diction that combined social qualities with the ethos of moderation, empiricism, and scientific rationality.

It was the Roman poet Horace who was the obvious prototype for this self-image and style; but we must learn to distinguish classicisms. It is not so much that this is a peculiarly "classical" period, but rather that it privileges one version of classicism, different from Elizabethan Ovidianism or the grander Grecophile simplicity of later eighteenth-century and Romantic poets. On the wider social and political scale, Virgil was also important, and an overarching analog with Augustan Rome was influential. [*See* ch. 33, "The Classical Inheritance."] Dryden, for example, compares Charles II with Augustus:

> Oh Happy Age! Oh times like those alone
> By Fate reserv'd for Great *Augustus* Throne!
> When the joint growth of Armes and Arts foreshew
> The World a Monarch, and that Monarch *You*.
> (*Astraea Redux*, ll. 320–3)

The first authority to call a modern period "Augustan" was Pope's friend Francis (later Bishop) Atterbury, and he takes up the widely received view that Edmund Waller had a central role in the "Augustan" refinement of English verse: "Waller undoubtedly stands first in the list of refiners, and, for ought I know, last too; for I question whether in Charles II's reign English did not come to its full perfection; and whether it has not had its Augustan age as well as the Latin" (1690, cited in Erskine-Hill 1983: 236–7). Pope himself was optimistic enough to imply that Anne's was an Augustan age, applying the old name "Augusta" to London in a brilliant celebration:

> Behold! *Augusta*'s glitt'ring Spires increase,
> And Temples rise, the beauteous Works of Peace.
> (*Windsor-Forest*, ll. 377–8)

Retrospectively, critics during the second part of the century found the later years of William and Mary and the reign of Anne a time "when the arts and polite literature were at their height in this nation" (Joseph Warton 1756, cited in Erskine-Hill 1983: 255). Oliver Goldsmith describes this as an era in which "the link between patronage and learning was entire . . . all who deserved fame were in a capacity of attaining it. When the great [Lord] Somers was at the helm, patronage was fashionable among our nobility. The middle ranks of mankind, who generally imitate the Great, then followed their example" (1759, cited in Erskine-Hill 1983: 258).

Howard Weinbrot's study *Augustus Caesar in "Augustan" England* (1978) has carefully delineated the more negative reading of Augustus in the period and shown how even Horace could be tarnished as a sycophant. As Howard Erskine-Hill indicates, however, this evidence should not be allowed to obliterate the positive images that were also current in the period. Pope in particular was able to exploit both negatives and positives: "Pope plays an Augustan role perhaps most clearly in his *Imitations of Horace*, where, as in the writing, so in the very printing, the reader is invited to witness the parallel-and-contrast that the poet sets up between himself and his own age, and Horace and Augustan Rome" (Erskine-Hill 1983: 268 n. 3).

It is clear therefore that the modern academic development of the usage "Augustan" has roots in the eighteenth century itself. The noun "Augustanism" was first used of eighteenth-century English literature early in the twentieth century, and both the concept and the word soon became established in surveys and literary histories – and remain so right up to this day, despite a significant chorus of objections. Reference to Pope, however, the foremost "Augustan" poet, reminds us of another slightly contradictory spin on "Augustanism." If the word in one sense means a "correct," "classical," "polished" kind of poetry that was held to dominate in the period, it was

used, especially by a group of brilliant Ivy League scholars of the eighteenth century such as Maynard Mack, W. K. Wimsatt, and Paul Fussell, to mean the traditionalist writers and poets such as Pope and Swift who stood in broad opposition to the social developments of their own time and were the heirs of Renaissance humanism. This version of the eighteenth century has been assailed on all sides in recent years for overestimating the centrality of these writers and taking their ideological constructions at face value and in their own terms. The Marxist and feminist critic Laura Brown is one of the most influential of those who has interrogated the ideologies of these writers in this way (Brown 1985). More recently, Brean Hammond, for example, has argued that we must look skeptically at their self-portrayal and understand their own complicities with and ambivalences about both professional literature and popular culture (Hammond 1997).

And if one image of Augustanism is polite, sober, and this-worldly, Renaissance humanism is surely defined by a deep blend of Christianity and classicism. The issue of Augustanism and secularism is thus a complex one. As the historian J. C. D. Clark has insisted, no one could argue that early eighteenth-century England witnessed general processes of secularization such as were seen in the twentieth century (Clark 1985). Yet the tone of this poetry does show a shift toward the presentation of social life, politics, and labor in their own right. In any era, of course, no matter how secular, there will always be deeply religious people, and the existence of monks or Pentecostalists in our society is no argument against a more general secularization. Certainly there are very genuine religious poets in the eighteenth century. Sometimes, as Donald Davie has shown in the case of Isaac Watts, religious fervor fits well with a sober classicism of phrasing. There is also a strong movement in the period, associated with the critic John Dennis and with poets such as Sir Richard Blackmore and Aaron Hill, toward the Christian sublime. As we shall see, however, the sublime is a mode that achieves more poetic success in its secularized versions. In the plentiful religious poetry of the time, Christianity often seems to be set apart from everyday life in a way that was not true in the earlier seventeenth century. The same might perhaps be said of the elements of religious baroque in Dryden's work, since baroque always seems to depend on a *strenuous* assertion of power (the power of the papacy and the Counter-Reformation Church as well as the power of kings and courts). [*See* chs. 4, "Poetry and Religion," and 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm."]

Is the "Renaissance humanism" of the great traditionalist Augustans at odds with the partial secularism of their period? In some ways, yes. As Maynard Mack shows, the *Essay on Man* is in touch with various older ways of thought that are under threat in the eighteenth century, traditions of analogy and versions of metaphysics (Pope 1950). Swift and, increasingly, Pope *are* oppositional figures in many respects. Neither, though, comes across as a fervent Christian writer. In this, as in other respects, they provide a critique of a society with whose values they are themselves implicated. As Blanford Parker has argued, their "Renaissance humanism" exists only in diminished form, although he underestimates the way in which Pope at least is

able to recapture something of the richness of the past through an effort of *imagination* (Parker 1998).

One of the most exciting recent developments in eighteenth-century studies, however, has been a revival of interest in the neglected Whig tradition of "sublime" poetry, mentioned above [*see* chs. 32, "WHIG AND TORY POETICS," and 37, "THE SUBLIME"]. This stemmed from the translation of Longinus in 1652 and the perceived link between Protestant biblical poetics and the Whig cult of political liberty (Williams 2005). The attempt at the religious sublime seems very different from the "Gloom of the Tory Satirists," and in some cases this self-consciously "modern" aspiration to go beyond the ancients led to a disparagement of classical models, as with the "city" poet, Sir Richard Blackmore. But the issue replicates the age-old Christian ambivalence about the classics. The founder of the movement, John Dennis, seeks classical as well as biblical authority, and much of the Whig poetry that follows is classical, especially as it becomes secularized in addressing more directly political issues. It often involves the imitation and enthusiastic development of georgic as the obvious mode for the treatment of topics that were growing steadily in importance: trade, industry, labor, and nature [*see* ch. 29, "THE GEORGIC"]. But Pope can also write in celebratory mode, in *Windsor-Forest*, and even produce a religious sublime poem, "Messiah" (1712). Although it is tempting to keep the word "Augustan" for the more conservative tradition, Whig writers such as Leonard Welsted had more reason to take the Augustan analogy seriously than the Tory "Augustans." The two modes might better be regarded as opposite sides of the same coin, both stylistically and in terms of a wider ethos.

Following on from a direct hint from Dennis, James Thomson took the impulses behind this kind of poetry toward the detailed description of nature in his famous *The Seasons*. He very clearly associates himself, in the preface to "Winter," with the movement toward renewing poetry by religious enthusiasm, but his poem focuses on the works of nature much more than on their Creator. It is thus, for all its paeans of praise to Shaftesbury's divine spirit in nature, primarily a secularized version of the poems of Protestant enthusiasm. It is also clearly an expanded georgic in its subject matter. In its carefully controlled levels of diction and addresses to the reader it is an example of Marshall Brown's useful category of "the urbane sublime," and thus, as Ralph Cohen suggests in a seminal article, it stems from poetic practices shared with the verse satire of the period (Brown 1991: 22–39; Cohen 1967). [*See* ch. 14, "JAMES THOMSON, *THE SEASONS*."]

Does not the word "Augustan," however, impose a straitjacket on all the richly various kinds of Restoration and early eighteenth-century poetry of which we have now become aware? Certainly the publishing conditions of Restoration writing, and the association with broadsheets and pamphlets, combined with the exhibitionist tendencies of the Court wits to create a self-consciously impolite tone that informs much of the verse of the period [*see* ch. 27, "VERSE SATIRE"]. We have to understand that what we might consider an Augustan mode was slow to establish itself as the central style. Also, within itself this style permitted a considerable variation between

a high mode and a much more colloquial one. At both extremes – (say) the Pindaric ode of the late seventeenth century and the occasional deliberately cultivated demotic of sophisticated poets writing political squibs or self-conscious light verse – we can see what James Sutherland described long ago as a kind of holiday from the usual conventions, whether serious or not (Sutherland 1948). New classes of writers were also beginning to break into print. As Blanford Parker suggests, however, there remains something of a common base to many of these modes, the more official and the less official, a growing realism and interest in empirical particulars that make certain kinds of high style harder to write convincingly (Parker 1998).

Any general sense of this poetry also has to be wide enough to include "romantic" elements. We can analyze Shakespearian comedy in terms of its "majority" and "minority" moods, and there is an analogy here. "Classical," confusingly, has to include elements of romance in the sense that classical literature may contain extravagant emotions, natural description, cultivated melancholy, and so on. A "romantic mode," as David Fairer calls it, is fashionable from time to time in early eighteenth-century literature (Fairer 2003). It may develop out of an imitation of such moods in Virgil, for example, or reflect a domestication of heroic tragedy, or be a sign of a certain sentimentalization and softening of Christian impulses, or take the form of a slightly new version of conventional retirement poetry. If we knew Pope only by "Eloisa to Abelard" (1717) we would think of him as an extraordinarily anticipatory poet, since the poem is "romantic" in scenery, in gothic and medieval elements, and in the popular sense of being a passionate poem about romantic love. Yet it is also a poem in heroic couplets and an imitation of Ovid's heroic epistles. [*See* ch. 11, "ALEXANDER POPE, *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK* AND 'ELOISA TO ABELARD.'"]

To sum up then, it makes sense to retain "Augustan" as a "convenient shorthand" (Sambrook 1990: 263) for the "majority" modes of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century poetry. The term, unlike "Pre-Romanticism," is so firmly established that it would be difficult to get rid of anyway, and there is a sufficient core of meaning behind it to make it legitimate as a broad general category, provided due respect is paid to the wide variety of other modes and moods of the time. Yet it is now unpopular with specialists, and there is no pressing reason to defend it if it does pass out of general use. "Early eighteenth-century poetry" would be more consistent with the suggestions made below; or, to be very precise, "late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century poetry."

Pre-Romanticism

As the century progressed, Thomson's *Seasons* proved to be more and more influential. Thomson's particularized descriptions derive in part from Lockean empiricism and the privileging of the sense of sight. His extraordinary expansiveness depends on his use of the same philosopher's association of ideas, whereby a landscape creates an association with a mood, a mood with a reflection, and so on. (It is an increasingly

explored paradox that the philosopher of the eighteenth-century compromise was also the source of so much in Romanticism.) Thomson's whole structure of subjective associations was to become the main principle of poetry by the midcentury (Cohen 1957). It is especially apparent in what are often presented together as a group of poets in the 1740s: Thomas Gray, William Collins, and the Warton brothers, Joseph and Thomas. Collins praises Thomson in an eloquent memorial poem with the plangent line, "In yonder grave a Druid lies," and Mark Akenside would hardly have written *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) without the example of Thomson's Miltonic blank verse.

There is the sense of something genuinely new in the work of these poets, and various factors contribute to this, each of which has been presented as a partial or total explanation. The growing cult of nature in the period results from Newtonian science, Shaftesbury's celebration of the neoplatonic divine spirit, the fashion for landscape painting, and the Lockean focus on particulars. As we have seen, nature was increasingly associated with subjective moods and thus blended in with the growing interest in individual psychology and the imagination. The cult of the sublime was also linked with the concern for the expression of the passions, and the latter in turn modulated into sentiment and sensibility in this so-called Age of Reason. Blanford Parker argues for a Protestant revival at about this time, reflected in Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–5), although Young's work is also striking in its more subjective emotionalism (Parker 1998: 219–30). But with Christopher Smart a true Christian sublime is attained, and later in the century William Cowper's evangelicalism takes the dual form of sensibility and criticism of his society. The passions and the sublime in Gray and Collins are secularized, however, as we have also seen with their predecessor Thomson.

The cumulative endeavor of these poets also relates to a complex of political thought in the period that stems originally from the values of the tradition of independent and thus virtuous landowners known as "civic humanism." This leads on to the idea that as a society grows more sophisticated so it is in danger of growing more alienated from the true sources of feeling and thus from the true sources of poetry. There is an inevitable reaction here, then, against the values of refinement and politeness, a reaction most famously expressed in Joseph Warton's claim that Pope's is not the greatest form of poetry (*An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, 1756). The same complex contributes to the new sense of the past and the quest for new sources. There is a celebration of what is presented as the naturalism of Greece, for example, and the minor poems of Milton become a central influence. The primitive British past is explored, and the romance sources of the Middle Ages. As John Sitter has argued, the fall of Walpole and the death of Pope were also major factors (Sitter 1982). There was a movement away from specific party politics and satire, although, as Christine Gerrard and Dustin Griffin have shown, there are still aspirations in Gray for the poet to fulfill a public role (Gerrard 1994; Griffin 2002). In Cowper politics and social critique return, although, interestingly, he uses the topos of retirement, like Pope, as a rhetorical vantage point. [*See* ch. 27, "Verse Satire."]

The idea, however, that there is a specific literary period bridging the gap between neoclassicism and Romanticism seems to have begun with French critics' perceptions of their own literature. The idea was also applied to Italian literature. The same concept was increasingly implied by late nineteenth-century critics of English literature, as a title such as W. L. Phelps's *The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement* (1893) would indicate. The word "Pre-Romanticism" itself was not introduced into English until the translation of Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian's *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (1921). Occasionally used in popular literary textbooks to this day, the term has long been out of fashion among critics, as noted above, for its false teleology. Ultimately, as Robert Griffin makes clear in *Wordsworth's Pope* (1995), it implies a literary history judged entirely from the perspective of Romantic thought. Marshall Brown has attempted to revive the term in a major book boldly entitled *Preromanticism* (1991), where he argues that the prefix can be taken to mean not a *prelude* to something but as indicating *a time before* something has come into existence, since teleology implies a goal that is not yet realized. Thus these "pre-Romantic" writers, in Brown's view, differ from earlier eighteenth-century poets in that they articulate in tentative fashion a new set of problems to which they can find no answer. The Romantics proper both proposed answers and also articulated new, if analogous, problems. This is a view with much to commend it, but it is surely impossible to change the meaning of an old, misleading term single-handedly.

Marshall Brown's formulation, for all his protestations, also seems to continue the pattern of thinking about these poets mainly in the context of what is to come. Perhaps this remains unavoidable, but, as I have said, it fails to do justice to some very individual poets writing over a period of about fifty years, some of whom, like Smart, are very difficult to fit into such a narrative. John Sitter is among those who have proposed the term "Post-Augustan" instead (Sitter 1982). Logically speaking, that might seem to be open to the opposite danger of seeing these "midcentury" poets as a footnote to the Augustan period, but in practice this is not the effect, and the term has the advantage of not exaggerating discontinuity. Patricia Spacks, for example, has written a cogent essay on the conventional eighteenth-century elements in Collins's work (Spacks 1983). Samuel Johnson was a great opponent of many of the new trends in poetry, but he warmly praised what we might regard as the Augustan centrality of Gray's famous *Elegy*, and it is surely true that the newer elements in the poem come in more obliquely than we might expect. Smart and Chatterton both write excellently in conventional Augustan modes, the latter returning to satire before his death. Edward Young wrote Popean satires as well as the *Night Thoughts*, and Cowper's *The Task* (1785) is both the epitome of new sensibility, even subjectivism, and yet conversational and mock-heroic. But "Post-Augustan" is very limiting as a definition too. It has to lump together poets such as Gray, Collins, the Warton brothers, and Akenside (who each in their own way at least make grand gestures toward something new) with poets such as Johnson,

Goldsmith, George Crabbe, and Charles Churchill, who remain more self-consciously old-fashioned. We come up against the limitations of chronology once more. It is appropriate to call Johnson a "late Augustan," in part because of his deliberate critical attack on the new modes in the *Lives of the Poet*s and his great defense of Pope: "If Pope be not a poet, then where is poetry to be found?" (Johnson 1905: vol. 3, 251). Yet there is also a lesser sense in which he is "*Post*-Augustan" in his movement toward a high seriousness of tone and in his more strenuous Christianity. Goldsmith and Crabbe have more elements of what is new: the partly subjective nostalgia of the former, the interest in extreme states in the latter. But "Post-Augustan" seems to fit these particular poets better than it does the wider category to which Sitter refers.

A very exciting recent reassessment of the "Pre-Romantic" poets is signaled in the new label "Early Romantics," as used in Robert Griffin's *Wordsworth's Pope*. This term really grasps the nettle, emphasizing these writers' radicalism while refusing to patronize them or treat them as subordinate to the canonical Romantics. The argument is also associated with David Fairer's work on the Warton brothers and the claim that their linkage of new poetic impulses to the rediscovery of romance sources is a defining moment (Fairer 2003: 156). A recent collection of essays entitled *Early Romantics* (Woodman 1998) combines studies of poets once called "Pre-Romantic" with new approaches to women poets such as Ann Yearsley, who displays a remarkable privileging of untutored "genius" and imaginative inspiration – qualities which merit the title "Early Romantic" if any of these writers do.

Doubts about this terminology remain, however. If the Wartons undoubtedly had a coherent strategy, their actual poetic achievement remains small. Thomas Warton remains notoriously ambivalent, as evidenced by his "Verses on Sir Joshua Reynolds's Painted Window at New-College Oxford," which reluctantly rejects gothic (Warton 1782). Even if Gray and Collins (with his dismissal of Waller) can usefully be seen as part of the same broad program, this is hardly the case with (say) Smart. Furthermore, although "romantic" is a perfectly legitimate usage to convey an interest in romance sources, it is not the primary sense of the word as it used for the canonical Romantics, who did not make massive use of medievalism. "Early Romantics," despite all the advantages of the term, thus remain confusingly different from "Later Romantics."

The basic point, perhaps, is that there is a very distinctive difference between such "Early Romantics" and "Later Romantics," even though the earlier poets certainly influence the later and deal in part with similar issues. Another highly relevant development in eighteenth-century studies in recent years has been the growing recognition of the importance of sentiment and sensibility in the period, and the readiness to take this development more on its own terms and see it less through the eyes of its opponents and satirists [*see* ch. 9, "POETRY, SENTIMENT, AND SENSIBILITY"]. Northrop Frye's essay "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility" (1956) was an important harbinger of this approach, and it also suggested a different label for the

poetry of this transitional age. Frye's terminology has the advantages of linking the poetry of the period with the prose and of seeing it as equally distinct from both what precedes and what follows. Wordsworth, for example, is as clearly writing in reaction against some aspects of sensibility, just as he is also opposed to polite classicism. His own attitudes toward both nature and the poor are self-consciously differentiated from the cult of sensibility, although it certainly influenced him.

Yet "sensibility" seems too broad a term to cover the work of so many different poets. Frye intends to apply it to the *later* eighteenth century, and there is certainly a link between humanitarian interests and sensibility at that time as well as a special interest in female poetry of sensibility, as in Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) and the poetry of Helen Maria Williams. Marlon Ross has seen this "feminising" of literary culture as characteristic of the whole later period (Ross 1989). The poets of the 1740s likewise cultivate a new emotionalism, but the attempt to revive a poetry of sublimity and passion, as in Collins's "The Passions. An Ode for Music," is rather different from sensibility, even though in practice the two may overlap ("He gave to Misery all he had, a tear," writes Gray in the *Elegy* [l. 123]). The rather rhetorical Christian passion of the *Night Thoughts* is different from sensibility, and so, certainly, is Smart's Christian enthusiasm. Cowper's Christian feeling, on the other hand, does seem to overlap with what we might consider sensibility.

So perhaps there is no entirely appropriate term or category for this mid- to later eighteenth-century poetry. Every such candidate, as we have seen, runs the danger of lumping together very different poets and very different eras. In the 1740s, a group of poets sharing similar concerns – notably Gray, Collins, the Warton brothers – struck out in new directions (although it is easy to exaggerate their originality), and their new aspirations were backed up by criticism and scholarly endeavors. Poets of the later century seem more isolated figures, although naturally enough influenced by the poets who precede them, both the Augustans and the new poets of the 1740s. Some of these later poets go further in directions already indicated by their predecessors: in the imitation and development of earlier British sources, for example, which takes radical form in the case of Chatterton and Macpherson, or in the cultivation of subjective emotion. As Marshall Brown has shown, this foregrounding of subjective consciousness and the subjective self is the primary and distinctive achievement of this poetry of the later eighteenth century, and this is to be found in the apparently more conservative Oliver Goldsmith as well as in the more obviously "Pre-Romantic" Cowper (Brown 1991).

The problematics of the subjective self also appear to coalesce with one theme that these later poets do have strikingly in common with Gray and Collins: the self-image and role of the poet. Gray's "The Bard" and "The Progress of Poesy," and Collins's "Ode on the Poetical Character," evoke and yet at the same time disclaim the status of an inspired prophetic poet. It has been pointed out that, like Gray in "The Bard," the later poets seem to be able to claim that mantle only through acquiring the voice of a past poet – Ossian or Thomas Rowley, for example. Smart once again is different here, although he may not at first seem so. In assimilating his voice to that of

the prophet-poet King David, Smart makes use of Christian typology in which the believer actually *becomes* that which is imaged.

It is perhaps better, then, simply to speak of mid-eighteenth-century poets and later eighteenth-century poets, since there is no one obvious generic term that serves at the same time both to differentiate and yet link the two, let alone avoid overgeneralizing about the individual poets in either broad chronological category. It is much the same with the relationship of either or both with Romanticism. These poets show different levels of awareness of and engagement with many of the broad and complex, and now increasingly controversial, elements usually seen as part of the definition of Romanticism. They are also differentiated from them in other respects. Their styles, for example, often retain an allusive, and hence rather elaborate, classicism. The aspiration to the sublime in their work may involve gestures toward a more traditional high style than is usual with either the Augustans or the Romantics. For Gray, the "language of the age is never the language of poetry" (letter to Richard West, 1742, in Gray 1971: vol. 1, 192). As with the Augustans, however, even when these poets write more plainly, a certain elite politeness may remain, and there is some degree either of condescension or of self-conscious sentimentality when they deal with lower-class subjects. Each of these poets has a subtly different sense of nature, of the imagination, and of the interrelationship between the two. None, however, sees nature either as divine in and of itself or alternatively as being brought forth in all its glory by the human creative imagination.

Robert Burns and William Blake are late eighteenth-century poets themselves, and they are much influenced by their predecessors and contemporaries, but their work nevertheless constitutes a radical difference. As we have seen, poets in the eighteenth century felt an increasing desire for spontaneity and genuineness of emotion in a sophisticated society; but Schiller makes a brilliant distinction between what he calls naïve (i.e. genuinely primitive and thus authentic) literature and the sentimental or self-conscious mode (1795, cited in McGann 1996: 119–20). Both Burns and Blake speak out of a different class perspective from most of their predecessors and yet with no feeling whatsoever of inferiority. Both Burns's popular poems and Blake's *Songs* mark a deep inversion of traditional norms in this respect, and show that genuine simplicity still remains an option. Blake, of course, an "Early Romantic" in the fullest sense, goes much further in creating, as Wallace Jackson has indicated (1978: 89–121), a radical mythic structure that is able to link the visionary with the ordinary, to bring the transcendent back together again with the real and the human. Wordsworth's myth of nature achieves a similar purpose. Only Smart, among the poets discussed earlier in the chapter, with his remarkably realized re-presentation of a more orthodox Christianity, was able to bring about anything quite like this.

See also chs. 4, "Poetry and Religion"; 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 33, "The Classical Inheritance"; 35, "Recovering the Past: Shakespeare, Spenser, and British Poetic Tradition"; 37, "The Sublime."

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35

Recovering the Past: Shakespeare, Spenser, and British Poetic Tradition

Carolyn D. Williams

Eighteenth-century poets are sometimes seen as separate from the traditions that link Renaissance and Romantic poetry, too obsessed with the classical traditions of ancient Greece and Rome to value their more recent predecessors. Yet evidence from their perceptions of literary history, their attitudes to the past in general, their editing practices, and their critical and creative responses to earlier literature reveals a more complex and exciting picture.

In fact, eighteenth-century English poetry begins with Geoffrey Chaucer (1340/4–1400): the most distinguished publication of 1700 was *Fables Ancient and Modern; Translated into Verse, from Homer, Ovid, Boccace, and Chaucer: with Original Poems* by John Dryden (1631–1700), opening with an adaptation of "Palamon and Arcite," a chivalric epic from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Dryden acknowledges that he and his contemporaries have poetic roots in native genealogies: "*Spencer* more than once insinuates, that the Soul of *Chaucer* was transfus'd into his Body; and that he was begotten by him Two hundred years after his Decease. *Milton* has acknowledg'd to me, that *Spencer* was his Original" ("Preface" to *Fables*, in Dryden 1956–2002: vol. 7, 25).

A landscape familiar in later histories of English literature emerges, with the middle distance dominated by two Renaissance epics, *The Faerie Queene* (1590–6) by Edmund Spenser, and *Paradise Lost* (1667) by John Milton, while Chaucer's more remote position is becoming established. The loftiest eminence was already in place: Dryden had paid homage to William Shakespeare in his "Prologue to the *Tempest*, or the *Enchanted Island*" (1670), announcing that "*Shakespear*'s pow'r is sacred as a King's" (Dryden 1956–2002; vol. 10, p. 6, l. 24).

A similar pattern, though with a more Celtic emphasis, appears at the midcentury in Thomas Gray's "The Bard. A Pindaric Ode" (1757). The Middle Ages here are represented by a picturesquely disheveled Welsh bard, persecuted by Edward I (1239–1307):

> Robed in the sable garb of woe,
> With haggard eyes the Poet stood;

(Loose his beard, and hoary hair
Stream'd, like a meteor, to the troubled air)
And with a Master's hand, and Prophet's fire,
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.
(ll. 17–22)

He invokes the ghosts of his slain colleagues to join him in a "'dreadful harmony'" (l. 47) which not only foretells but magically brings about the series of deaths and disasters that will dog Edward's line until the throne returns to "'genuine Kings, Britannia's Issue'" (l. 110) at the accession of Henry VII, the first Tudor monarch, in 1485. The Bard takes an appropriately professional interest in the revival of poetry that will accompany this happy event. Gray feels no need to name Spenser, Shakespeare, or Milton, confident that his readers will recognize them in the following lines:

"The verse adorn again
"Fierce War, and faithful Love,
"And Truth severe, by fairy Fiction drest.
"In buskin'd measures move
"Pale Grief, and pleasing Pain,
"With Horrour, Tyrant of the throbbing breast.
"A Voice, as of the Cherub-Choir,
"Gales from blooming Eden bear;"
(ll. 125–32)

Allegiance to a native British tradition gathers strength as the century progresses, but is always a force to be reckoned with in the study of eighteenth-century poetry. Nevertheless, the past was not the object of uncritical veneration: eighteenth-century people saw as moldering and outdated much that we would find impressively antique. This attitude sometimes receives poetic expression: inspired by her experiences as a kitchen-maid in the medieval Edgcote House, Mary Leapor (1722–46) composed a poem about "Crumble-Hall" (1751),

Whose *Gothic* Towers, and whose rusty Spires,
Were known of old to Knights, and hungry Squires.
There powder'd Beef, and Warden-Pies, were found;
And Pudden dwelt within her spacious Bound.
(ll. 15–18)

At best, its venerable glamor fades into coarse, if wholesome, simplicity. At worst, it harbors dirt and inconvenience:

Safely the Mice through yon dark Passage run,
Where the dim Windows ne'er admit the Sun.

> Along each Wall the Stranger blindly feels;
> And (trembling) dreads a Spectre at his Heels.
> (ll. 52–5)

Between 1747 and 1752 the owner pulled it down and built a new house on the site; Leapor's poem makes it easy to see why. [*See* ch. 16, "MARY LEAPOR, 'CRUMBLE-HALL.'"]

Dryden's adaptations of Chaucer can be interpreted as an attempt to restore a medieval cultural artifact and bring it into modern use. His *Fables* is the first volume to present Chaucer in roman type (white letter) instead of the old-fashioned gothic (black letter), thus making his text easier to read and setting it on equal terms with more recent literature. Readers who today regard Chaucer as a sophisticated versifier and a master of irony might find Dryden's "Preface" excessively patronizing; his Chaucer is "a rough Diamond" (Dryden 1956–2002: vol. 7, 39), whose verse is "not Harmonious to us" (p. 34) and whose obscenities call for strict censorship: "I have confin'd my Choice to such Tales of *Chaucer*, as savour nothing of Immodesty" (p. 38). Dryden declares that "some People are offended that I have turn'd these Tales into modern *English*," not because such an enterprise is unnecessary, but because they "look on *Chaucer* as a dry, old-fashion'd Wit" (p. 39). Yet he boldly dubs Chaucer "the Father of *English* Poetry" (p. 33), whose *Canterbury Tales* form a lasting monument, since their narrators encompass "the various Manners and Humours (as we now call them) of the whole *English* Nation" (p. 37). Unfortunately, the fact that Dryden has found it necessary to provide a modern English version suggests that the original edifice, like Edgcote House, has already started to crumble.

Even though Renaissance English texts did not need translation, scholars strove energetically to provide the public with accurate editions that took proper account of linguistic and cultural differences. Anyone requiring detailed information about eighteenth-century contributions to their knowledge of Spenser and Shakespeare should consult the variorum editions of their works. It might seem surprising that so much explanation should be provided for readers in this period, many of whom had been born within a century of Shakespeare's death. Richard Steele (1672–1729), editor of the popular periodical *The Tatler*, designed for middle-class readers of moderate education, devotes a number to *Faerie Queene*, Book X, Canto IV, "in which Sir *Scudamore* relates the Progress of his Courtship to *Amoret* under a very beautiful Allegory" (no. 194, July 6, 1710, in Steele 1987: vol. 3, 45). He appears to assume that any reader who has been told the story will be able to derive moral instruction from the work, despite the strangeness of the language. Steele describes Amoret seated in the lap of Womanhood, who is accompanied by personifications of specifically female virtues, including "*Modesty*, holding her Hand on her Heart; *Courtesy*, with a graceful Aspect, and obliging Behaviour; and the Two Sisters, who were always linked together, and resembled each other, *Silence* and *Obedience*" (p. 48).

Steele declares that he is most pleased with this "beautiful Grouppe of Figures," observing that "*Womanhood* is drawn like what the Philosophers call an Universal

Nature, and is attended with beautiful Representatives of all those Virtues that are the Ornaments of the Female Sex, considered in its natural Perfection and Innocence" (p. 49). Modern readers who object to this critique will do so because Steele, who so uncritically encourages his female readers to emulate Amoret's meekness and his male readers to see her as the ideal woman, still inhabits Spenser's world.

Most readers, however, were grateful for any help the editors of Spenser could provide. In 1715, John Hughes (1677–1720) published his edition of Spenser: "the first use of the historical method in Spenserian criticism, and as such, a natural consequence of the scientific spirit of the late seventeenth century" (Wurtsbaugh 1936: 41). Thomas Warton (1728–90), whose "real lust" was "uncovering old books and manuscripts" (Wurtsbaugh 1936: 123), considered it his chief aim "to give a clear and comprehensive estimate of the characteristical merits and manner, of this admired, but neglected, poet. For this purpose I have considered the customs and genius of his age; I have searched his cotemporary [*sic*] writers, and examined the books on which the peculiarities of his style, taste, and composition, are confessedly founded" (Warton 1762: vol. 2, 263–4).

Warton's interest in Renaissance culture for its own sake was shared by John Upton (1707–60), whose edition of *The Faerie Queene* (1758) was frequently reprinted. In 1802, Spenser's *Poetical Works* were added to the new edition of Johnson's *British Poets*. According to the editor, John Aikin, it was now impossible for "the student of English verse" who had any "regard to his reputation" to remain "unacquainted with the works of one who fills such a space in the history of his art" (Spenser 1802: vol. 1, iii). The word "student" indicates a crucial change of attitude: paradoxically, the new generation of readers may understand his work better, precisely because they are conscious of living in different times.

Shakespeare's eighteenth-century reputation started from a higher point than Spenser's, but achieved an even more spectacular trajectory, as Bate shows in his account of "the rise of Bardolatry in the eighteenth century" (Bate 1997: 82). His poems, which seldom appeared in editions of his works, received little attention: the sonnets, in particular, full of elaborate conceits expressing obsessive lust and homoerotic passion, aroused a distaste that is "manifestly moral as well as aesthetic" (p. 40). The plays, however, were often discussed, and even edited, in a manner which highlighted their qualities as reading matter and erased their connection with the theater. In a breathtaking combination of social snobbery and anti-theatrical prejudice, Alexander Pope opposes dramatic to poetic values in the preface to his 1725 edition: "Players are just such judges of what is *right*, as Taylors are of what is *graceful*. And in this view it will be but fair to allow, that most of our Author's faults are less to be ascribed to his wrong judgment as a Poet, than to his right judgment as a Player" (Smith 1903: 51). Arguably the most influential critical work of the century is the "Preface to Shakespeare" (1765) by Samuel Johnson: he presents the plays to his readers less as a series of dramatic opportunities than as a fund of "practical axioms and domestick wisdom" (Johnson 1958–90: vol. 7, 62).

From eighteenth-century debates over the proper way to establish Shakespeare's text arose ideas about critical and editorial practice that remain fundamentally important to this day. To those such as Alexander Pope, Sir Thomas Hanmer (1677–1746; a baronet and former Speaker of the House of Commons), and the distinguished clergyman William Warburton (1688–1779), editing was chiefly "a matter of taste" (Smith 1928: 45). The same could be said of Nicholas Rowe (1674–1781), the most celebrated dramatist to edit Shakespeare in the century, whose 1709 edition was the first to bear the editor's name. An example of the result this "taste" might produce is an emendation of a passage at the beginning of *Twelfth Night*. Orsino demands to hear a strain of music again: according to the 1623 Folio text, he says,

> O, it came ore my eare, like the sweet sound
> That breathes vpon a banke of Violets;
> Stealing, and giuing Odour.
> (Shakespeare 1901: I. i, ll. 8–10)

Pope's alteration of "sound" to "South" has now become a popular reading, though the footnote indicates that there was always an undercurrent of controversy: George Steevens (1756–1800) in his 1785 edition argued extensively for Pope's emendation, while Rowe and others preferred "wind" (Shakespeare 1901: 9).

Lewis Theobald (1688–1744) adopted a different approach, which today would be defined as more professional: David Nichol Smith acknowledges his importance as "the first of our Shakespearian scholars," who "recognized that the time had come for an English classic to be treated like the classics of Greece and Rome" (Smith 1928: 41). He argued that readers who wished to understand Shakespeare should study the books he read, and the works of his contemporaries. Marcus Walsh notes the magnitude of his achievement, working under severe disadvantages: "No adequate historical dictionary was available to eighteenth-century editors before Johnson's *Dictionary*, a work heavily drawn on by Johnson himself in his work on Shakespeare. Theobald had to rely on much less satisfactory lexicographical resources, and on his own wide knowledge, and detailed recall, of writing of Shakespeare's time" (Walsh 1997: 147).

Pope was outraged by Theobald's proceedings. Their views of the past were incompatible: Theobald's treasured sources appeared to Pope as deservedly neglected rubbish, lacking the erudition and elegance of his own day. Still, he might have let Theobald alone had the latter refrained from publishing *Shakespeare Restored: or, a Specimen of the Many Errors, as well Committed, as Unamended, by Mr. Pope* (1726). Pope's attempted vengeance recoiled on himself. In his satire on false learning, *The Dunciad* (1728), he makes Theobald pray to his patron deity, the goddess of Dulness: "For thee I dim these eyes, and stuff this head, / With all such reading as was never read" (Pope 1939–69: vol. 5, I. 165–6). Thomas Warton vindicated Theobald, maintaining that, for the author of a critical commentary on "our elder poets," to give "specimens of his classical erudition" is not enough: "these strange and ridiculous books which Theobald quoted, were unluckily the very books which Shakespeare

himself had studied; the knowledge of which enabled that useful editor to explain so many difficult allusions and obsolete customs in his poet, which otherwise could never have been understood" (Warton 1762: vol. 2, 264–5). Succeeding scholars, who applied Theobald's principles with increasing thoroughness, included Edward Capell (1713–81), the first to transcribe every word rather than annotate an earlier edition, and Edmond Malone (1741–1812), whose 1790 edition retained its authority until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Closely linked to perceptions of what texts are worth reading, and how they should be edited, are ideas about literature's aesthetic value. Topics prominent on the eighteenth-century critical agenda appear in *The Spectator*, edited by Joseph Addison (1672–1719) with Richard Steele. Three matters of particular relevance to the current investigation are the superiority of elegant simplicity to self-advertising artifice, the demands of poetic decorum, and the changing meaning of "Gothick." These criteria may simply be applied to the text under discussion, or redefined, or dismissed as inappropriate, but they are seldom ignored. In each case the relationship between the present and the past, which may include classical as well as more recent literature, comes into play.

Addison aimed to improve his readers' taste by inculcating admiration for "that natural Way of writing, that beautiful Simplicity, which we so much admire in the Compositions of the Ancients" (*Spectator*, no. 62, May 11, 1711, in Addison 1965: vol. 1, 268). He observes that "As *true Wit* consists in the Resemblance of Ideas, and *false Wit* in the Resemblance of Words, . . . there is another kind of Wit which consists partly in the Resemblance of Ideas, and partly in the Resemblance of Words; which for Distinction Sake I shall call *mixt Wit*" (p. 265). He found a great deal of mixed wit in Abraham Cowley (1618–67), and abundant false wit in other seventeenth-century poets. Johnson discusses them in his "Life of Cowley" (1779), giving them a name that is still used today: "About the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets" (Johnson 1905: vol. 1, 18–19). He appears exasperated by their misplaced ingenuity: "Their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural; they are not obvious, but neither are they just; and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perverseness of industry they were ever found. . . . The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together" (p. 20).

Many readers today might feel that Johnson shows deplorable disrespect toward such well-loved poets as George Herbert (1593–1633) and John Donne (1572–1631), whose "Valediction, Forbidding Mourning," now a popular anthology piece, is dismissed with the observation that "it may be doubted whether absurdity or ingenuity has the better claim" (Johnson 1905: vol. 1, 34). Yet he has brought them to the notice of a wider public, and he concedes that they had some merit: "To write on their plan it was at least necessary to read and think" (p. 21). Furthermore, most of the passages he cites as examples of bad writing are, indeed, dire. Johnson and Addison also deserve credit for fearless impartiality: they apply identical criteria to the most prestigious of all seventeenth-century writers. Johnson remarked that, to Shakespeare,

a pun was "the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it" (Johnson 1958–90: vol. 7, 74). Addison had previously observed that "the Age in which *the Punn* chiefly flourished, was the Reign of King *James* the First. . . . [T]he Tragedies of *Shakespear*, are full of them. . . . [N]othing is more usual than to see a Hero weeping and quibbling for a dozen Lines together" (*Spectator*, no. 61, May 10, 1711, in Addison 1965: vol. 1, 260). Shakespeare is thus contextualized as a child of his time.

The rules of decorum require that the style be appropriate to the form and subject: to modern readers, its demands often appear pointless and sterile, spawned by the contamination of aesthetic standards with outmoded social distinctions. Eighteenth-century critics began to realize that breaches of decorum were caused not only by failure to maintain class boundaries, but by cultural changes brought about by the passage of time. Addison's treatment of ballads leads to a spectacular failure of nerve. In *The Spectator*, no. 70 (May 21, 1711), he gives a critique of the popular ballad "Chevy Chase" on the grounds that "an ordinary Song or Ballad that is the Delight of the common People, cannot fail to please all such Readers as are not unqualified for the Entertainment by their Affectation or Ignorance" (Addison 1965: vol. 1, 297).

He shows that, in its account of courageous conduct by groups of warring medieval barons, "Chevy Chase" shares many characteristics with a classical epic poem such as Virgil's *Aeneid*. The work conforms to the purpose of "an heroick Poem," which "should be founded upon some important Precept of Morality, adapted to the Constitution of the Country in which the Poet writes" (Addison 1965: vol. 1, 299). Both here and in a later paper he provides parallel quotations from ballad and epic to show how much is written "in the Spirit of *Virgil*" (*Spectator*, no. 74, May 25, 1711, p. 318). But when it comes to "the old Ballad of the *Two Children in the Wood*, which is one of the Darling Songs of the Common People, and has been the Delight of most *Englishmen* in some Part of their Age," he grows embarrassed, declaring "My Reader will think I am not serious." Nobody, according to Addison, could accuse it of being affected, and he bears testimony to its emotional power: it is

> a plain simple Copy of Nature, destitute of all the Helps and Ornaments of Art. . . . There is even a despicable Simplicity in the Verse; and yet, because the Sentiments appear genuine and unaffected, they are able to move the Mind of the most polite Reader with inward Meltings of Humanity and Compassion. (no. 85, June 7, 1711, p. 362)

Yet he cannot bring himself to quote one word. Presumably its childhood associations, bourgeois setting, and lack of armed combat conspire to make it "low."

Excessive domesticity can trigger a similar reaction, as in Johnson's remarks on *Macbeth*, I. v:

> Words which convey ideas of dignity in one age, are banished from elegant writing or conversation in another, because they are in time debased by vulgar mouths, and can be no longer heard without the involuntary recollection of unpleasing images.

> When Mackbeth is confirming himself in the horrid purpose of stabbing his king, he breaks out amidst his emotions into a wish natural to a murderer,
>
> ————————Come, thick night!
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes;
> Nor heav'n peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry, hold, hold!——
>
> (*The Rambler*, no. 168, October 26, 1751, in Johnson 1958–90: vol. 5, 127)

He claims that, although "all the force of poetry" is exerted in this passage, "perhaps scarce any man now peruses it without some disturbance of his attention from the counteraction of the words to the ideas." One problem arises because "the efficacy of this invocation is destroyed by the insertion of an epithet now seldom heard but in the stable, and *dun* night may come or go without any other notice than contempt" (p. 127).

The failure to use properties and language suitable to Augustan tragedy, whose characteristic weapon is the dagger, adds a further distraction: "we do not immediately conceive that any crime of importance is to be committed with a *knife*; or who does not, at last, from the long habit of connecting a knife with sordid offices, feel aversion rather than terror?" (Johnson 1958–90: vol. 5, 128). Finally, "who, without some relaxation of his gravity, can hear of the avengers of guilt 'peeping through a blanket'?" (Johnson 1958–90: vol. 5, 128).

We should not be too quick to accuse Johnson of undervaluing Shakespeare's unfettered sublimity. It is actually Lady Macbeth who is speaking here: her unimaginatively materialistic world picture is brilliantly reflected in Shakespeare's imagery. It is unlikely that Shakespeare wished to provoke laughter, but a certain degree of shock would be appropriate; Johnson, closer in time and culture, reacts with excessive sensitivity to a feature which later audiences miss completely.

Addison strikes another important note when he condemns as gothic the over-ingenious poetry that is more concerned with words than with meaning. His reference to monastic costume in "the *Region of false Wit*" associates the gothic with the Middle Ages:

> I discover'd in the Center of a very dark Grove a Monstrous Fabrick built after the *Gothick* manner, and covered with innumerable Devices in that barbarous kind of Sculpture. I immediately went up to it, and found it to be a kind of Heathen Temple consecrated to the God of *Dullness*. Upon my Entrance I saw the Deity of the Place dressed in the Habit of a Monk, with a Book in one Hand and a Rattle in the other. (*Spectator*, no. 63, May 12, 1711, in Addison 1965: vol. 1, 271)

Yet he locates false wit across the historical spectrum, classifying as "Gothick" both "an Epigram of *Martial*" (*c.*40–*c.*104) and "a Poem of *Cowley*" (*Spectator*, no. 70, May 21, 1711, in Addison 1965: vol. 1, 297). Nor are Addison's contemporaries exempt:

he laments that "the Taste of most of our *English* Poets, as well as Readers, is extremely *Gothick*" (no. 62, May 11, 1711, vol. 1, 269). A reaction began to develop, in which the gothic acquired dignity and glamor, and the idea that the term should automatically be regarded as a condemnation was rejected. For example, Hughes, in his *Essay on Allegorical Poetry* (1715), argues that comparing *The Faerie Queene* with the epics of Homer and Virgil

> wou'd be like drawing a Parallel between the *Roman* and the *Gothick* Architecture. In the first there is doubtless a more natural Grandeur and Simplicity: in the latter, we find great Mixtures of Beauty and Barbarism, yet assisted by the Invention of a Variety of inferior Ornaments; and tho the former is more majestick in the whole, the latter may be very surprizing and agreeable in its Parts. (Cummings 1971: 260)

Pope follows suit in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare (1725):

> one may look upon his works, in comparison of those that are more finish'd and regular, as upon an ancient majestick piece of *Gothick* Architecture, compar'd with a neat Modern building: The latter is more elegant and glaring, but the former is more strong and more solemn. (Smith 1903: 62)

By the end of the century, the quest for an independent gothic aesthetic was well under way, expressed in the criticism and creation of fiction, drama, and poetry, as well as fine art and architecture. Eighteenth-century poets engaged in many forms of productive negotiations with the past: these will form the subject of the rest of this chapter.

William Collins (1721–59) displays his admiration for Spenser, even in a passage which awards poetical supremacy to another poet. He recalls the girdle of Florimell in *Faerie Queene*, IV. v, which can be worn only by a perfectly chaste woman, in his "Ode on the Poetical Character" (1746). Collins imagines the gift of poetic inspiration as a divinely fashioned belt, the property of "Young *Fancy*" (l. 17), who

> To few the God-like Gift assigns,
> To gird their blest prophetic Loins,
> And gaze her Visions wild, and feel unmix'd her Flame!
> (ll. 20–2)

He feels it would be presumptuous for anyone but Milton to claim this high honor: Collins pictures him lying in a sacred grove beneath a prophetic oak tree, listening to the music of the spheres, and confesses his own unsuccessful attempts to emulate him:

> With many a Vow from Hope's aspiring Tongue,
> My trembling Feet his guiding Steps pursue;
> In vain . . .
> (ll. 70–2)

Although Milton is the only poet described as receiving this level of poetic inspiration, the fact that Collins uses an allegory derived from Spenser to introduce his subject suggests that he has a high opinion of Spenser, too, as an inspired poet. {*See* ch. 19, "WILLIAM COLLINS, 'ODE ON THE POETICAL CHARACTER.' "}

Poetic responses to Shakespeare take many forms. In "The Progress of Poesy" (1757) Thomas Gray devises an allegorical episode to illustrate the common belief that Shakespeare was, as Johnson put it, "the poet of nature" (Johnson 1958–90: vol. 7, 62):

> Far from the sun and summer-gale,
> In thy green lap was Nature's Darling laid,
> What time, where lucid Avon stray'd,
> To Him the mighty Mother did unveil
> Her aweful face: The dauntless Child
> Stretch'd forth his little arms, and smiled.
> (ll. 83–8)

However, the most impressive proof of Shakespeare's pervasive influence is provided by casual allusions that neither make nor require an explicit comment. Matthew Prior (1664–1721) begins his poem "On a Pretty Madwoman" (1740) with the line, "While mad OPHELIA we lament" (l. 1). There is no need to explain why this is a suitable name for an attractive young lady smitten with a mental illness: Shakespeare's characters are part of the language.

In the 1790s, a fashion for Shakespeare parodies is reflected in the poetry section of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The object of the exercise is to choose a speech and apply its structure to another topic: there is no intention to point to any flaw in Shakespeare's style. Nor is there any sense that the speech might be part of a dramatic dialogue: much of the material used is derived from soliloquies, with the famous "To be or not to be" speech (*Hamlet*, III. i) applied to several late eighteenth-century dilemmas. Sometimes the game is to use as many of Shakespeare's original words as possible, but applied to a new subject: a version by "J. S. H.," beginning "*To* ride, *or not to* ride?," defines equine unpredictability as the force which "*makes us rather* walk in clouted shoes / *Then fly to* horses *that we know not of*" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1792: June, 557–8, ll. 28–9). Generally, though, new words are required. The best-known exponent of this art was Thomas Ford (1742–1821), who, as "Mowbraensis," began to publish in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1792. The first group of his parodies includes a description of a cook's shop, based on the moment in *Romeo and Juliet*, V. i, when Romeo remembers an apothecary whose shop indicates extreme poverty: a man so poor must surely be desperate enough to sell Romeo the poison he needs to commit suicide. By contrast, Ford's catalogue of the cook's appetizing wares indicates a thriving business: his parody lowers the tone from tragedy to comedy, but, with its minute descriptions, pays tribute to Shakespeare's eye for concrete detail:

> A buttock stuff'd, nice tripe, and other strings
> Of well-spic'd sausages – and upon his board

> A sovereign remedy for empty stomachs,
> Green-peas and ducks, pork-steaks, and mutton-chops,
> Remnant of goose, pigeon-pye, and plates of cold ham,
> Were amply set out to make up a show.
> (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1792: Oct., 943, ll. 7–12)

Ford is still going strong in 1800, now under the Shakespearian name of Master Shallow. His fortieth offering includes a treatment of Jaques' speech on the seven ages of man from *As You Like It*, II. v, in which a professed cynic draws a picture of the unhappiness, helplessness, and futility which seem to be inevitable concomitants of the human condition. Ford's version is a heavily moralized account of a naughty child who successively becomes a truant, an idle apprentice, a "*Democrat*, / Loud for reform, and wily as the fox," a "*Sharper*, / With loaded dice, and false pack'd cards about him," and finally a "desperate *Highwayman*" who is tried at the Old Bailey and sentenced to execution, "Sans friend, sans hope, sans pity, sans reprieve" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1800: Nov., 1084, ll. 7–8, 11–12, 16, 23). These compositions provide fascinating insights into eighteenth-century preoccupations.

So far, all the creative responses considered have been written in eighteenth-century English. But this was not the language in which the texts that inspired them had been written. The specter of linguistic change could seriously damage poetic self-confidence. The effects appear in Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711), where new language is considered dangerous; conservatism, however, offers no security:

> In *Words*, as *Fashions*, the same Rule will hold;
> Alike Fantastick, if *too New*, or *Old*;
> Be not the *first* by whom the *New* are try'd,
> Nor yet the *last* to lay the *Old* aside.
> (Pope 1939–69: vol. 1, ll. 333–6)

Yet if nobody dared to try new words, and everybody abandoned familiar words for fear of being the last to use them, poetry would soon have no vocabulary. Something about language is clearly troubling Pope; his knowledge of earlier English literature has convinced him that he is composing his life's work in a perishable medium: "Our Sons their Fathers' *failing Language* see, / And such as *Chaucer* is, shall *Dryden* be" (ll. 482–3).

Others found grounds for hope in the past. John Hughes observed that Chaucer and Spenser

> have taken deep Root, like old *British* Oaks, and . . . flourish in defiance of all the Injuries of Time and Weather. The former is indeed much more obsolete in his Stile than the latter; but it is owing to an extraordinary native Strength in both, that they have been able thus far to survive amidst the Changes of our Tongue, and seem rather likely, among the Curious at least, to preserve the Knowledg of our Antient Language, than to be in danger of being destroy'd with it, and bury'd under its Ruins. (Cummings 1971: 248)

If older forms of English could be read with enjoyment, might they still be written? Some poets rode the storm of linguistic change by indulging in forgery, provoking bitter controversies that gave editors and scholars an opportunity to hone their newly devised critical tools. Thomas Chatterton (1752–70) devoted much of his tragically short life to refashioning Bristol's medieval literary heritage. He is best known today for two ballads, "An Excelente Balade of Charitie" (1770) and the "Mynstrelles Songe" from *Ælla* (1769), both ascribed to the fifteenth-century priest Thomas Rowley. Like Addison, Chatterton sought to demonstrate that the best traditional literature adhered to classical standards, but his methods were radically different: he "discovered" various medieval works in classical forms, including two fragments from the epic *Battle of Hastynges* (1768), three "Eclogues" (1769), an "Englysh Metamorphosis" (1769) in the manner of Ovid, and the tragedies *Goddwyn* (1769) and *Ælla*. An extract from this last illustrates Chatterton's characteristic combination of unwitting addiction to fashionable clichés with the gleeful realization that the play's Anglo-Saxon setting not only permits but demands a breach of more modern decorums, involving a reference to a beverage whose lowly existence is never acknowledged in Augustan tragedy. The jealous Celmonde soliloquizes about Ælla's marriage to the heroine, whom he loves:

> And cann I lyve to see herr wythe anere [another]!
> Ytt cannotte, muste notte, naie, ytt shalle not bee.
> Thys nyghte I'll putte stronge poysonn ynn the beere,
> And hymm, herr, and myselfe, attenes [at once] wyll slea.
> (Chatterton 1971: vol. 1, ll. 133–6)

The century's skullduggery culminated with the anonymous publication of a play originally attributed to Shakespeare: *Vortigern: an Historical Tragedy* (1799), "discovered" by William Henry Ireland in 1795 and performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, on April 2, 1796; the premiere had originally been planned for the previous day, but was delayed, "for fear of the enterprise seeming Foolish" (Bate 1997: 84).

The use of past styles did not necessarily involve forgery: the eighteenth century was, after all, the golden age of poetic imitation. One of Pope's imitations was first published anonymously as "A Tale of Chaucer. Lately found in an old Manuscript" (1727). Presumably working on the assumption that his readers would be disappointed if it did not savor of immodesty, he produces a tale about a young man who tries to hide a stolen duck from a group of ladies by stuffing it into his breeches:

> Forth thrust a white Neck, and red Crest.
> *Te-he* cry'd Ladies; Clerke nought spake:
> Miss star'd; and gray Ducke crieth *Quaake*.
> (Pope 1939–69: vol. 6, ll. 20–2)

A virgin in the party glumly concludes that it is safer to suffer frustration than "trust on Mon, whose yerde can *talke*" (l. 26). Spenser provided a softer target for imitators, since his own style was itself a fake, consisting of Elizabethan English with a

top-dressing of supposedly medieval grammar and vocabulary. The most influential Spenserian imitation was *The Castle of Indolence* (1748), an allegorical fantasy by James Thomson (1700–48). Romantic sensibilities were charmed by his description of a "pleasing Land of Drowsyhed" and "Dreams that wave before the half-shut Eye" (Thomson 1986: I. 46–7).

Lines between imitation and originality, authentic and fake, are often blurred. Any publication generally involves a measure of collaboration: for example, when Thomas Percy (1729–1811) compiled *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), a glorious medley of verse from the Renaissance to his own time, his editorial practice ranged from the light-handed to the downright creative. Entirely original, but still drawing on older poetic traditions, is the epoch-making *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834). The latter's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is the clearest example of this harmony: both an exquisitely crafted pastiche of a medieval ballad and a uniquely eerie masterpiece in its own right. Romantic and gothic literature are rooted in such minglings of past and present. Eighteenth-century poets would have been making a grave mistake had they underestimated their debt to their predecessors; today's readers would be equally wrong to ignore the role of eighteenth-century poets and critics who preserved, transmitted, and occasionally created our earlier literary heritage.

See also chs. 16, "Mary Leapor, 'Crumble-Hall' "; 19, "William Collins, 'Ode on the Poetical Character' "; 34, "Augustanism and Pre-Romanticism"; 36, "The Pleasures and Perils of the Imagination."

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36
The Pleasures and Perils of the Imagination

Paul Baines

I

A useful characterization of imagination is uttered by Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as he rejects the "antique fables" the lovers have related and celebrates "cool reason" against "shaping fantasies":

> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact . . .
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
>
> (V. i. 3–17)

This is ironic, coming from someone who is himself an "antique fable" speaking in verse; and, as Hippolyta points out, the narration rests on better evidence than "fancy's images" (V. i. 25). But Theseus' view, stripped of context, was one of the most quoted passages of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, cited in poems, essays, novels, and books of travel. There was perhaps at least as much sense of pleasure as of peril in the quotation. However, observing the practice, Blake reminds us: "Thus Fools quote Shakespeare; the above is Theseus' opinion not Shakespeare's." Blake interprets Theseus' description of imagination in a negative sense, an interpretation which can certainly be linked to widespread seventeenth-century suspicions about the nature of the imagination. For Bacon (in *The Advancement of Learning*, 1605), imagination's pleasure was also its peril:

> Poesy is a part of learning in measure of words for the most part restrained, but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth truly refer to the imagination; which, being

> not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined; and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things. (Bacon 1926: 101)

Robert Burton, in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), identifies imagination with "Phantasie," the power of comparing sense-impressions by which one "faines infinite other unto himselfe." "This faculty is most Powerfull and strong" in those subject to melancholy, "and often hurts, producing many monstrous and prodigious things" (Burton 1989: vol. 1, 152). Burton has a whole chapter of psychopathology, "Of the force of Imagination," detailing actual bodily harm that develops from an insufficiently controlled imagination. It is a mental health issue; as imagination "rageth in melancholy persons," causing them to conceive "fantastical visions," so it can work "even most forcibly sometimes in such as are sound," and "a corrupt, false, and violent imagination" is a psychological disaster.

II

There is something consciously radical, therefore, about Joseph Addison's series of eleven papers on the subject, which ran from June 21 to July 3, 1712 in *The Spectator* (nos. 411–21). Addison is so keen on the "pleasures of the imagination" that his essays begin to sound like an advertisement for them. He begins by identifying sight as "the most perfect and most delightful of all our Senses," in that it "fills the Mind with the largest Variety of Ideas." Sight stores up in us a private treasury of images, which it is the business of the imagination to recall, recombine, and represent, essentially for private pleasure. Imagination is thus the very mark of the discerning consumer and his class: "A Man of a Polite Imagination, is let into a great many Pleasures that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving . . . It gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in every thing he sees, and makes the most rude and uncultivated Parts of Nature administer to his Pleasures." As "a gentle Exercise to the Faculties," Imagination keeps the mind alert without study and provides an innocent, victimless pleasure (no. 411, in Addison 1965: vol. 3, 535, 538, 539).

Addison envisages two kinds of imagination: that which processes images of the visible world, and that which recreates them. The first kind is most impressed and stimulated by greatness, novelty, and beauty, since these stretch the mind's capacity. "Our Imagination loves to be filled with an Object, or to graspe at any thing that is too big for its Capacity" (no. 412, in Addison 1965: vol. 3, 540). Addison is sure that the associated pleasures are holy: greatness reminds us to admire God; newness answers our curiosity about the wonders of creation; beauty stimulates our delight in creation. God has endowed the world with aspects it does not strictly need in order that we may derive pleasure from the mere perception of them, a "pleasing Delusion" that comes as a free gift from a benevolent deity (no. 413, in Addison 1965: vol. 3, 546).

Since "it is in the Power of the Imagination, when it is once Stocked with particular Ideas, to enlarge, compound, and vary them at her own Pleasure," the "Secondary"

pleasures of the imagination are stimulated by recollection of scenes and objects, the power of comparing artistic representations with the physical world. Poetry has a special role here: "As we look on any Object, our Idea of it is, perhaps, made up of two or three simple Ideas; but when the Poet represents it, he may either give us a more complex Idea of it, or only raise in us such Ideas as are most apt to affect the Imagination" (no. 416, in Addison 1965: vol. 3, 558–9, 561). Poets can control the process of perception in a way that nature cannot. It is thus crucial that poets are themselves endowed with powerful imaginations, and that they keep their professional skills up:

> [A] noble Writer should be born with this Faculty in its full Strength and Vigour, so as to be able to receive lively Ideas from outward Objects, to retain them long, and to range them together, upon occasion, in such Figures and Representations as are most likely to hit the Fancy of the Reader. A Poet should take as much Pains in forming his Imagination, as a Philosopher in cultivating his Understanding. (no. 417, in Addison 1965: vol. 3, 563)

Towards the end of the series, Addison ventures tentatively onto more problematic ground: "There is a kind of Writing, wherein the Poet quite loses sight of Nature, and entertains his Reader's Imagination with the Characters and Actions of such Persons as have many of them no Existence, but what he bestows on them. Such are Fairies, Witches, Magicians, Demons, and departed Spirits." The "*Fairy way of Writing*" (Dryden's phrase) is "more difficult than any other that depends on the Poet's Fancy, because he has no Pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own Invention." It is "impossible for a Poet to succeed in it, who has not a particular Cast of Fancy, and an Imagination naturally fruitful and superstitious." To some extent this brings Addison toward the psychopathology of Burton: "For the *English* are naturally Fanciful, and very often disposed by that Gloominess and Melancholly of Temper, which is so frequent in our Nation, to many wild Notions and Visions." Almost in spite of himself, Addison responds to this too as pleasure, since the national poet was supereminent in this vein: "*Shakespear* has incomparably excelled all others. That noble Extravagance of Fancy, which he had in so great Perfection, thoroughly qualified him to touch this weak superstitious Part of his Reader's Imagination; and made him capable of succeeding, where he had nothing to support him besides the Strength of his own Genius." The fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* sound more spookily real to Addison than they do to Theseus (no. 419, in Addison 1965: vol. 3, 570, 572–3).

In all this there is very little peril. True, Steele breaks into Addison's series at one point to stress that "the Pleasures of the Imagination are what bewilder Life, when Reason and Judgment do not interpose," and he endorses what he sees as Addison's attempt to supply that rational guide (Addison 1965: vol. 3, 547). And in his final paper, Addison does touch on the pains of imagination, especially madness: "There is not a Sight in Nature so mortifying as that of a Distracted Person, when his Imagina-

tion is troubled, and his whole Soul disordered and confused. *Babylon* in Ruins is not so melancholly a Spectacle" (no. 421, in Addison 1965: vol. 3, 579). But even this prospect is offset by Addison's concluding focus on what it must be like to be God, and able to stimulate human imagination as you please.

III

Addison's man of imagination is essentially a gentleman of quality, with enough property, intelligence, and leisure to peruse the works of nature and of poets. It was a role to aspire to, one continually espoused by *The Spectator* itself, throughout its immense commercial and literary success. To speak of imagination's pleasures is to imply that imagination can be indulged in from choice, with a certain end in view; it can, in effect, be consumed. As John Brewer reminds us, "the pleasures of the imagination" belong to an eighteenth-century cultural revolution in which the hierarchy of Court patronage was replaced by a market in fine arts from which no one with purchasing power was excluded (Brewer 1997). As consumer choice became more powerful a secondary market in cultural guidance opened up, offering a defensible basis for the luxury pleasures of art.

In this context it is hardly surprising that another zealous proponent of the pleasures of the imagination was an even more successful entrepreneur of the literary product: Alexander Pope. In the *Essay on Criticism* (1711), he celebrates the "play" of "Beams of warm *Imagination*" and uses his own imagination to mount the famous simile comparing intellectual endeavor to the experience of climbing a mountain range he had never seen: "*Alps* on *Alps* arise!" (ll. 58, 232, in Pope 1939–69: vol. 1, 245, 265). *The Rape of the Lock*, begun before Addison's papers but extensively revised afterwards, was in one way a kind of supreme imaginative transformation of a "trivial" event, and a recognition of the transformatory power imagination offers the consumer. All the actors in the poem might plausibly be said to be subject to both the pleasures and the pains of imagination; the sylphs look like Pope's response to Addison's commendation of the "fairy way of writing."

But Pope's most extended fantasia on the imagination occurs, like Addison's, in his greatest commercial success: the subscription translation of *The Iliad*. In the "Preface" (1715), Pope announces: "Homer is universally allow'd to have had the greatest Invention of any Writer whatever."

> It is to the Strength of this amazing Invention we are to attribute that unequal'd Fire and Rapture, which is so forcible in *Homer*, that no Man of a true Poetical Spirit is Master of himself while he reads him. What he writes is of the most animated Nature imaginable; every thing moves, every thing lives, and is put in Action. If a Council be call'd, or a Battle fought, you are not coldly inform'd of what was said or done as from a third Person; the Reader is hurry'd out of himself by the Force of the Poet's Imagination, and turns in one place to a Hearer, in another to a Spectator. (Pope 1939–69: vol. 7, 3–4)

The notes to the translation continue this discourse persistently. Pope highlights a vivid image as "a fine Imagination" (vi. 390n.), "a noble Imagination" (viii. 88n.), "a very grand Imagination" (xiii. 32n.), even "a most gallant Imagination" (xiii. 751n.), suggesting the extent to which each image is actually processed. Commenting on a simile in Book II, he writes:

> The Imagination of *Homer* was so vast and so lively, that whatsoever Objects presented themselves before him impress'd their Images so forcibly, that he pour'd them forth in Comparisons equally simple and noble; without forgetting any Circumstance which could instruct the Reader, and make him see those Objects in the same strong Light wherein he saw them himself. (ii. 534n.)

Homer is the supreme visual artist. But it is not simply a matter of Homer being so well supplied with sense impressions from the material world that he automatically unloads them in superfluity ("the natural Discharge of a vast Imagination"; xx, concluding note). Homer has the human imagination always in his own mind, and Pope several times comments on the accuracy with which Homer depicts the mental lives, and especially the imaginations, of his heroes. Paris is addicted to "those Sciences that are the Result of a fine Imagination" (vi. 390n.), Hector has "in Imagination already forced the *Grecian* Retrenchments, set the Fleet in Flames, and destroyed the whole Army" (viii. 226n.). Menelaus and Achilles are alert in the same way. Homer causes us to imagine what is going on in someone else's imagination. And this is because he can imagine our mental lives too.

> The Reader sees the most natural Night-Scene in the World; he is led step by step with the Adventurers, and made the Companion of all their Expectations, and Uncertainties. We see the very Colour of the Sky, know the Time to a Minute, are impatient while the Heroes are arming, our Imagination steals out after them, becomes privy to all their Doubts, and even to the secret Wishes of their Hearts . . . (x, concluding note)

The reader's imagination is kept focused, it supplies necessary details, puts us in the scene. When Hector picks up his son in Book VI, Pope remarks that "There never was a finer Piece of Painting than this"; listing Homer's selection of detail, he contends: "All these are but small Circumstances, but so artfully chosen, that every Reader immediately feels the force of them, and represents the whole in the utmost Liveliness to his Imagination" (vi. 595n.). In its power and speed the imagination is thus, so far as Homer is concerned, a wholly pleasurable thing, with no critical or medical peril attached to it at all.

This is not to say that Pope had no doubts about the role of the imagination. He would very likely have agreed with John Hughes, who in editing Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* in the same year that Pope began publishing Homer, found that the "fairy way of writing" could overstep the mark:

> The chief Merit of this Poem consists in that surprizing Vein of fabulous Invention, which runs thro it, and enriches it every where with Imagery and Descriptions more

> than we meet with in any other modern Poem. The Author seems to be possess'd of a kind of Poetical Magick; and the Figures he calls up to our View rise so thick upon us, that we are at once pleased and distracted by the exhaustless Variety of them; so that his Faults may in a manner be imputed to his Excellencies: His Abundance betrays him into Excess, and his Judgment is overborne by the Torrent of his Imagination. (Spenser 1715: lviii–lix)

Pope abandoned a planned Persian fable "in which I should have given a full loose to description and imagination. It would have been a very wild thing" (Spence 1966: vol. 1, 151). His *Peri Bathous* (1728) is a catalogue of images that Pope found extravagant or nonsensical. Imagination has the power to deform the world; a Dunce must

> consider himself as a grotesque painter, whose works would be spoil'd by an imitation of nature, or uniformity of design. He is to mingle bits of the most various, or discordant kinds, landscape, history, portraits, animals, and connect them with a great deal of flourishing, by head or tail, as it shall please his imagination, and contribute to his principal end, which is to glare by strong oppositions of colours, and surprize by contrariety of images. (Pope 1986: 191–2)

The Dunciad (1728–43) is Pope's often strenuously imagined gallery of Duncely monstrosities, "on Fancy's easy wing convey'd" (Pope 1939–69: vol. 5, iii. 13), framed by an overmastering irony that prevents identification with the images presented.

IV

An Essay on Man (1733–4), contrastingly, seems to award itself poetic privilege to survey the unseen universe even as it argues that such imaginative attempts have the seed of blasphemy in them. At the same time it acknowledges a dark side to imagination's function within individual psychology, as the toxic "ruling passion" gains sway in the mind ("Epistle II," in Pope 1939–69: vol. 3, i. 148): "Imagination plies her dang'rous art, / And pours it all upon the peccant part" (ll. 143–4). Even here, however, Pope's point is not that Imagination itself is "peccant" (or diseased), since "Reason itself but gives it edge and pow'r" (l. 147) – the whole mind is given over to the Ruling Passion, imagination merely fueling an already determined process.

The *Essay* was Pope's entry in the catalogue of post-Miltonic "sublime" poems claiming unfettered imaginative scope to range over the universe, often with an increased accent on the operation of the perceiving mind [*see* ch. 37, "The Sublime"]. A slightly earlier poem of this kind, James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726–30), crowds a multitude of reflections, narratives, descriptions, and images into a four-part structure, and makes the unseen visible or imaginable. Here there is less sense of a necessary restraint to imagination: "catch thy self the Landskip, gliding swift / Athwart Imagination's vivid Eye," Thomson advises ("Spring," in Thomson 1981: ll. 458–9). The problem is more one of equivalence:

> Behold yon breathing Prospect bids the Muse
> Throw all her Beauty forth. But who can paint
> Like Nature? Can Imagination boast,
> Amid its gay Creation, Hues like hers?
> (ll. 467–70)

"Fancy . . . fails beneath the pleasing Task" – yet "tho' successless, will the Toil delight" (ll. 473–4, 480); Thomson makes the effort anyway, for pleasure's sake. There is no problem attached to soaring on "Fancy's Eagle-wing" ("Summer," l. 198). Even the "PHILOSOPHIC MELANCHOLY" ("Autumn," l. 1005) about which Burton worried is now (mostly) aligned with creativity, since that mood "inflames imagination" (l. 1011) to good effect: "Ten thousand thousand fleet Ideas, such / As never mingled with the vulgar Dream, / Croud fast into the Mind's creative Eye" (ll. 1014–16). The "visionary scene" is not merely invoked by the poem (l. 1122), but realized: "With swift Wing / O'er Land and Sea Imagination roams," the poem says of itself (ll. 1334–5).

Imagination is a devout attempt to read the world in terms of God's creative wisdom. Where Thomson might be said to cast doubt on imagination is in his last poem, *The Castle of Indolence* (1748), where "a most enchanting Wizard" seduces pilgrims into "a pleasing Land of Drowsyhed," a deceptive happy valley of dreamy sloth (Thomson 1986: i. 12, 46). It is beautifully imagined as a Spenserian fancy, even as Thomson's poet claims not to be able to imagine it (i, stanza xlv). But in the second canto it is completely destroyed by the Knight of Arts and Industry, wielding "an anti-magic Power that hath / Truth from illusive Falshood to command" (ii. 597–8). The poem stigmatizes "Indolence" rather than imagination, but it seems to borrow some of its characteristic features from the realm of fancy (in this it may be aligned with *The Dunciad*).

Four years before this Pope had told the bookseller Dodsley to offer a decent price for a new poem: Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744). Akenside adopted and developed Addison's general categories (grandeur, newness, beauty) but was keen to assert that imagination is more important than pleasure; not only does it link us with the divine imagination that created the world in the first place, but it is only imagination (the ability to recall vividly and compare experiences) that allows us to make ongoing moral sense out of what we perceive. In a long note (to Book III, ll. 18–19) Akenside states: "The influence of the imagination on the conduct of life, is one of the most important points in moral philosophy. It were easy by an induction of facts to prove that the imagination directs almost all the passions, and mixes with almost every circumstance of action or pleasure" (Akenside 1772: 106).

Akenside seeks not only to offer us "an account of the natural and moral advantages resulting from a sensible and well-form'd imagination" ("Argument of the Third Book") but to make a poem that can "enlarge and harmonize" the reader's imagination ("The Design") (Akenside 1772: 70, 6). The man of imagination must ascend Pope's imaginary Alp and send "from heights aërial . . . his eye / Around a wild horizon" (iii.

232–3); the soul should not "Consent her soaring fancy to restrain" but search through "loftier views" of comets and constellations to "wide creation's utmost shore" – and indeed, beyond into "the gloomy void" (iii. 239, 254, 264, 267). This is a divine mission entrusted to our "bold imagination" (iii. 227).

There can be problems. "Where fancy cheats the intellectual eye, / With glaring colours and distorted lines," our moral sense goes astray (iii. 29–30); "those lying forms which fancy in the brain / Engenders" must be curbed (iii. 63–4), especially among the young:

> From the inchanting cup
> Which fancy holds to all, the unwary thirst
> Of youth oft swallows a Circæan draught,
> That sheds a baleful tincture o'er the eye
> Of reason . . .
>
> (iii. 46–50)

But in an extended series of images towards the end of the poem, Akenside demonstrates how it is all meant to work: the "child of fancy" contemplates the store of mental images in his "pregnant breast," resolves to create "he knows not what excelling things," and lets his "plastic powers" get to work (iii. 375, 376, 378, 381). He becomes, without embarrassment, Theseus' poet:

> with loveliest frenzy caught,
> From earth to heaven he rowls his daring eye,
> From heaven to earth. Anon ten thousand shapes,
> Like spectres trooping to the wisard's call,
> Flit swift before him.
>
> (iii. 383–7)

From earth, ocean, heaven, and the "dark abyss" he assembles "rising phantoms," compares, contrasts, and puts them in order, just as "the voice divine" once arranged "from Chaos old the jarring seeds / Of nature" (iii. 389, 391, 399–400). [*See* ch. 17, "MARK AKENSIDE, *THE PLEASURES OF IMAGINATION*."]

V

In all these cases, poets espouse imagination warmly but encode or enact a retreat or caveat of varying intensity. From about the middle of the century, however, the caveat begins to disappear. The poetry of Gray and Collins typically has the poet conjure a scene that cannot actually be seen and is thus wholly and positively imaginary. Half a century after Pope's alpine simile, Goldsmith's "The Traveller" surmounts an Alp to imagine scenes from the adjacent countries. In Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770), "Imagination fondly stoops to trace" a rural idyll now despoiled (Goldsmith 1966: vol. 4, l. 225). The bard is now against civilization, and "imagination" is

beyond the polite niceties of mere pleasure: it is coming to mean something like "higher thought." Pope, and Pope's view of what the imagination did, suffered in this change. Joseph Warton's Ode "To Fancy" (1746) celebrated the "magic" power of imagination to waft us on "rapid wings" over material boundaries (Warton 1746: ll. 14, 17). When Warton came to compose the first substantial critical account of Pope, he wrote: "It is a creative and glowing IMAGINATION, . . . and that alone" that makes the poet (Warton 1782: vol. 1, v) – and Pope does not possess "a lively plastic imagination" (vol. 1, 133).

> It is manifest, that *good sense* and *judgement* were his characteristical excellencies, rather than *fancy* and *invention*; not that the author of the *Rape of the Lock*, and *Eloisa*, can be thought to want *imagination*, but because his *imagination* was not his predominant talent, because he indulged it not, and because he gave not so many proofs of *this* talent as of the *other* . . . The perusal of him affects not our minds with such strong emotions as we feel from *Homer* and *Milton*; so that no man of a true poetical spirit, is *master of himself while he reads* them. (vol. 2, 408–9)

Warton thus adroitly purloins Pope's own praise of Homer's imagination to use against him.

Other poets shift their emphasis. Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–5) is a series of contemplations on life, the universe, and everything, presented as images against the backdrop of night – in other words, the whole displays, and seeks to prompt, imagination. But where imagination is specifically mentioned, the faculty has much less creative virtue than Pope conceives it to have. We are "Imagination's Fool" in our fears of death ("Night IV," in Young 1989: l. 14); imagination is a "*Paphian* Shop" of feeble desires: "In This is seen Imagination's *Guilt*; / But who can count her *Follies*? ("Night VIII," ll. 994, 1004–5). We may be invited to "indulge / The warm *Imagination*" in contemplation of God's power, but we have already been told that such attempts founder: "In Mid-way Flight Imagination tires" ("Night IX," ll. 1565–6, 1220). Better if we "*Imagination*'s airy Wing repress" and "Wake all to *Reason*" ("Night IX," ll. 1442, 1444).

But when Young comes to write *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), things have changed. Young argues that poets need to look inside rather than outside, to reverence themselves rather than models. Here, imagination has a "strong wing" and one can enter "the bright walks of rare Imagination" (Young 1759: 13, 55). But in espousing the cause of originality against "imitation" (of literary models, but also of the external world), Young comes to denigrate Pope because of his intense engagement with classical literature and his failure to produce his own epic poem rather than translate Homer's. "Had he a strong Imagination, and the true sublime?" (p. 68). Only a certain kind of imagination is now of any use: it is not merely the ability to produce images that counts, but the production of a certain kind of image: high, noble, deep, serious, fervent – above all, it is a matter of *feeling*. Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* had already assigned to the imagination a "creative power" that is beyond merely "representing at pleasure the images of things" (Burke 1759: 15–16). As with Addison, imagina-

tion seeks limitlessness, enjoys that which lies uncompleted, to be supplemented and extended, and consequently it seeks all the way up to the infinity of God and all the way down to the infinite promise of atoms; it loves "*Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude* and *Silence*" as giving it something to work with (p. 125). As the science of mind pushed enquiry further and further back into the individual human mind, so poetry looked more and more for a source of images that was not external at all but actually produced autonomously by internal processes. As poetry tended to abandon outward social and economic engagement in favor of private sensation, so it was reconstituted in terms of a hidden and private economy – the imagination becomes a producer rather than a consumer, the very sign of possessive individualism.

VI

This was not a straightforward "progress." Christopher Smart, a poet whose claim to imaginative richness is very strong today, and who celebrates the "firey-wing'd imagination" for its attempt to get close to the divine ("On the Eternity of the Supreme Being," l. 138, in Smart 1987), maintained conservative wisdom in "Reason and Imagination. A Fable" (1763). Imagination is conceived as a flighty female, kitted out in fashionable gear and make-up and bearing a wand "which Magick's utmost pow'r excell'd" (l. 56). She proposes marriage to Reason, offering to transport him "To those bright plains, where crowd in swarms / The spirits of fantastic forms . . ." (ll. 107–8). Reason declines the offer, but proposes in turn to come to her aid whenever "your raptures rise" (l. 123); he deprives her of her "wand and winged steed" and gives her instead "this compass and this rule" (ll. 134–5).

Smart's friend Samuel Johnson was still more sober on the issue. In the very year of Akenside's *Pleasures* Johnson published a biography of the poet Richard Savage that might have been subtitled "The Disasters of the Imagination" (1744). Johnson salutes Savage's "ardent imagination," declaring him (approvingly) to have had "an imagination not to be suppressed" and an impressive "gaiety of imagination" (Johnson 1905: vol. 2, 326, 338, 343). But gradually this faculty turns away from creativity and toward escapism, becoming a personal problem rather than a poetic asset. Savage "lulled his imagination with . . . ideal opiates," schemes of happiness never to be fulfilled. He used "to amuse himself with phantoms of happiness . . . and willingly turned his eyes from the light of reason, when it would have discovered the illusion, and shewn him, what he never wished to see, his real state" (p. 380). There came a point when he could imagine writing, but could not actually do it – his schemes lasted "till the vigour of his imagination was spent, and the effervescence of invention had subsided," and were then dropped (p. 390). Finally Savage admits that fanciful schemes have produced "a chaos of my imagination," and he dies (p. 421).

In Johnson's *Rambler* essays we can see a similar ambivalence. Johnson praises Milton's "sallies of imagination" (*Rambler*, no. 140, in Johnson 1958–90: vol. 4, 381), and seems to regard the "vehement and rapid" "Imagination of the first authors" as a positive thing (no. 158, in vol. 5, 77). But he confesses himself bemused by the "wild strain of imagination" shown in old romances (no. 4, in vol. 3, 20). Biography prompts

a sympathetic "act of the imagination" by which we relive the deeds of others to our own moral benefit (no. 60, in vol. 3, 318). But imagination distorts our judgment, and we tend not to be very good at understanding it (nos. 92, 93, 121, in vol. 4; 156, in vol. 5). "Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the inclosures of regularity," writes Johnson (no. 125, in vol. 4, 300), making imagination sound like some kind of intellectual freedom fighter. If there is a trace of admiration in these ringing phrases, by the time of *Rasselas* (1759) we are all but back in Burton's psychological world. Imagination is strongly linked with that desire for which there is no adequate object or fulfillment, as it had been in Johnson's early poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. The apparently wise hermit confesses to "vanities of imagination, which hourly prevail upon me" (Johnson 1958–90: vol. 16, 82). Imlac thinks the Pyramids must have been erected "in compliance with that hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life, and must be always appeased by some employment" (p. 118). After hearing from an astronomer who believes he controls the weather, we are offered a miniature dissertation on "the dangerous prevalence of the imagination," to which the astronomer has fallen victim. Imlac once more sees the cause: "There is no man whose imagination does not sometimes predominate over his reason . . . No man will be found in whose mind airy notions do not sometimes tyrannise, and force him to hope or fear beyond the limits of sober probability. All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity" (p. 150). His companions one by one confess their private fantasies and resolve to cure themselves by sober, social activity; the astronomer is gradually cured of his malaise by socialization and female company.

Few men were more troubled by the prospect of mental disarray than Johnson; he had studied "diseases of the imagination" intensely, according to Mrs Thrale (Piozzi 1786: 77). It was not a faculty one could sedately choose to indulge at leisure; rather, it was so powerful one had to keep it in check all the time. His analysis here is a kind of imagination about imagination, within a careful fiction itself exotic and visionary. Literature itself could offer unexpected remedy, as when Johnson in the "Preface" to his edition of Shakespeare (1765) manages to recruit the dramatist to the anti-imagination cavalry, a sort of Knight of Arts and Industry against fantasy:

> This therefore is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirrour of life; that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious extasies, by reading human sentiments in human language; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions. (Johnson 1958–90: vol. 7, 65)

By the time Johnson comes to reflect on a lifetime's experience of poetry, and the biographical and economic forces that produce it, in the *Lives of the Poets*, imagination is more evenly poised between usefulness and error. Blackmore is censured for

acquiescing too easily in the "first suggestions of his imagination" (Johnson 1905: vol. 2, 253); Collins, "by indulging some peculiar habits of thought was eminently delighted with those flights of imagination which pass the bounds of nature" (vol. 3, 337). Akenside, in endeavoring to display the pleasures of the imagination, confuses us with too much imagery. The Bible keeps imagination in its proper place: it is read "with submissive reverence, and an imagination over-awed and controlled" ("Cowley," vol. 1, 49). "Imagination is useless without knowledge," we are told ("Butler," vol. 1, 212). But when Elijah Fenton writes, of Roscommon, "his imagination might have probably been more fruitful and sprightly, if his judgment had been less severe," Johnson is minded to be withering: "It is ridiculous to oppose judgement to imagination; for it does not appear that men have necessarily less of one as they have more of the other" (vol. 1, 234, 235).

Johnson knows well enough that in poetry only pleasure will do anything at all: "Works of imagination excel by their allurement and delight; by their power of attracting and detaining the attention" ("Dryden," in Johnson 1905: vol. 1, 454). "Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason" – a reversal of Smart's priorities ("Milton," vol. 1: 170). Fortunately, certain poets show us how it should be done. Congreve "very early felt that force of imagination and possessed that copiousness of sentiment by which intellectual pleasure can be given" (vol. 2: 213–14). Smith's "judgement, naturally good, soon ripened into an exquisite fineness and distinguishing sagacity, which as it was active and busy so it was vigorous and manly, keeping even paces with a rich and strong imagination, always upon the wing, and never tired with aspiring" (vol. 2: 3). Thomson has "the eye which Nature bestows only on a poet, the eye that distinguishes in every thing presented to its view whatever there is on which imagination can delight to be detained" (vol. 3: 298–9); Johnson almost seems disposed to be seduced by the opening canto of *The Castle of Indolence*, "a scene of lazy luxury, that fills the imagination" (vol. 3: 294). Milton's *Comus* may, as a masque, be necessarily "given up to all the freaks of imagination," but "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" are simply "two noble efforts of imagination" (vol. 1: 168, 167). As for *Paradise Lost*, the epic task of describing the universe and human history required the utmost stretch of vision; but fortunately Milton had "an imagination in the highest degree fervid and active, to which materials were supplied by incessant study and unlimited curiosity" (vol. 1: 177). Milton can even survive what sounds like a criticism: "he had accustomed his imagination to unrestrained indulgence, and his conceptions therefore were extensive" (vol. 1: 177).

Johnson knew what was happening to Pope's reputation and mounted a spirited defense, which appears to grant Pope two parts creativity to one part control:

> Pope had, in proportions very nicely adjusted to each other, all the qualities that constitute genius. He had Invention, by which new trains of events are formed and new scenes of imagery displayed, as in *The Rape of the Lock* . . . He had Imagination, which strongly impresses on the writer's mind and enables him to convey to the reader the various forms of nature, incidents of life, and energies of passion, as in his *Eloisa*, *Windsor Forest*, and

> the *Ethick Epistles*. He had Judgment, which selects from life or nature what the present purpose requires, and, by separating the essence of things from its concomitants, often makes the representation more powerful than the reality. (Johnson 1905: vol. 3, 247)

This was something of a rearguard action: Pope continued to have his defenders on the score of imagination (most redoubtably, Byron); but outside Johnson's circle the theoretical goalposts were being not so much moved as positioned much more narrowly.

VII

Philosophers were beginning, reluctantly, to take the imagination seriously. David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) does not regard the illusions of imagination in the positive light that poets do, speaking commonly of the mind's "fictions" or "feigning." Nonetheless he finds that imagination occupies a central role in consciousness, supplying in a way that the senses and reason cannot do a concept of continuity and stability in what would otherwise be a mere chaos of impressions. Hume was unhappy about relying on "a principle so inconstant and fallacious," though it is possible to trace a line from him through Kant and into Romantic conceptions of the imagination (Hume 1739–40: vol. 1, 461). David Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749) – a major influence on some of the Romantics, notably Coleridge – has a section identifying the "Pleasures of the Imagination" as the first category of intellectual pleasures; but Hartley associated such pleasures with youthful understanding of the world, to be replaced by soberer efforts at sympathy with God.

In literary theory the deification of "genius" was proceeding rapidly, but there was still caution. In Alexander Gerard's *An Essay on Genius* (1774), imagination begins to assume the power previously assigned to judgment.

> However capricious and unaccountable this faculty may be often reckoned, yet it is subject to established laws; and is capable, not only of such extent as qualifies it for collecting ideas from all the parts of nature, but also of such regularity and correctness as is in a great measure sufficient for avoiding all improper ideas, for selecting such as are subordinate to the design, and for disposing them into a consistent plan, or a distinct method. (Gerard 1774: 70)

The "first and most essential constituent" of genius is "boundless fertility . . . inexhaustible copiousness of invention," whether in Homer or in Newton (p. 44). These two also exhibit "regularity" of imagination, which is not here the restraint of reason so much as the organicism of design: "such a turn of imagination as enables the associating principles, not only to introduce proper ideas, but also to connect the design of the whole with every idea that is introduced" (p. 46). But the work must cohere: "If regularity be absent, an exuberant invention will lose itself in a wilderness of its own creation. There is a false fertility, which arises from a disordered and irregular

fancy" (p. 49). The *Faerie Queene* "discovers inexhaustible richness of invention" but is chaotic and irregular in this respect (p. 52).

The poet James Beattie, in *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (1783), included one "on memory and imagination" that ends with a whole chapter offering "Directions for the Regulations" of imagination. This amounts mainly to the avoidance of what we would call bipolar disorder, to which "this capricious faculty" is especially prone (Beattie 1783: 194). A "dangerous levity of imagination" can be retrained by application to geometry and history (p. 196). A "*gloomy* Imagination, when it grows unmanageable, is a dreadful calamity indeed," Beattie writes, citing the example of Swift; here the suggested therapy is exercise, sociable amusements, and lightweight practical study, such as agriculture (p. 198). Imlac would have approved.

However, by the late eighteenth century the "proper study of mankind" had clearly taken an interior turn, with imagination as the dominant principle of mental unity. The consequences for aesthetics were deep. Scarcely a radical figure, Sir Joshua Reynolds, in Discourse 13 of his lectures at the Royal Academy (1786), places imagination over reason in the judgment of art, because aesthetics must ground its analytic views on the mental effects that art actually produces. "For though it may appear bold to say it, the imagination here is the residence of truth" (Reynolds 1787: 3). Reynolds also cautions against "an unfounded distrust of the imagination and feeling, in favour of narrow, partial, confined, argumentative Theories" (p. 5). Art is not an imitation of external nature. "The very existence of Poetry depends on the licence it assumes of deviating from actual nature, in order to gratify natural propensities by other means" (p. 11). Architecture "applies itself, like Music (and I believe we may add Poetry) directly to the imagination, without the intervention of any kind of imitation" (p. 24). The "great end" of all arts is not to replicate nature, not even to instill virtue, but "to make an impression on the imagination and the feeling" (p. 23). Art can "gratify the mind by realising and embodying what never existed but in the imagination" (p. 29).

This pronouncement came from a pillar of the critical establishment – and, of course, a hugely successful commercial artist. The Romantics would take one more step by trying to remove the imagination from the social and economic circuit altogether, making it not merely an adjunct to religion but a kind of religion in itself – "the divine body in every man," as Blake (a not very successful commercial artist) put it. The peril of being consumed by the imagination has almost become the pleasure to be aimed at, and the greatest danger associated with your allotted "shaping spirit of imagination" (as Coleridge laments in the "Dejection" Ode, l. 86) was not that it might possess you, but that you might lose it.

See also chs. 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"; 11, "Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* and 'Eloisa to Abelard'"; 17, "Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination*"; 34, "Augustanism and Pre-Romanticism"; 35, "Recovering the Past: Shakespeare, Spenser, and British Poetic Tradition"; 37, "The Sublime."

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37
The Sublime

Shaun Irlam

The sublime is perhaps one of the most venerable, yet most elusive and unstable terms in aesthetics. It has been around since classical times and enjoyed a renaissance of interest in the closing decades of the twentieth century. It has also been fraught with numerous and often contending meanings during its long history. Before even reviewing the concept of the sublime, we should recognize that such an enterprise ironically reproduces an experience of the sublime. One finds oneself, in Pope's phrase, facing down the "great Sublime [one] draws," given the sheer volume of literature that has accumulated on the subject (*Essay on Criticism*, l. 680, in Pope 1939–69: vol. 1). A comprehensive survey of the field covered by the sublime being well beyond the scope of this short essay, our goal will be to trace in broad strokes some contours of this concept and its influence on poetry and literary criticism in the eighteenth century.

As a simple general axiom, the sublime might be defined as a mode of *aesthetic* encounter with infinity or what mimics it: that which exceeds the capacities of the senses, whether massive or minute. It describes the sense of elation sometimes mixed with apprehension that accompanies this encounter. It is therefore typically engaged with extremities of height, depth, vastness, magnitude, and power. In 1747 John Baillie observes that

> every person upon seeing a grand object is affected with something which as it were extends his very being, and expands it to a kind of immensity. Thus in viewing the heavens, how the soul is elevated; and stretching itself to larger scenes and more extended prospects, in a noble enthusiasm of grandeur quits the narrow earth . . . Hence comes the name of sublime to every thing which thus raises the mind to fits of greatness . . . that object can only be justly called the sublime, which . . . disposes the mind to this enlargement of itself, and gives her a lofty conception of her own powers. (Ashfield and de Bolla 1996: 88)

Just a decade later in 1757, Edmund Burke, the best-known English philosopher of the sublime during the eighteenth century, succinctly identifies the core of the

concept. "The ideas of eternity and infinity are among the most affecting we have, and yet perhaps there is nothing of which we really understand so little, as of infinity and eternity" (Burke 1987: 61). Marjorie Hope Nicolson gave her magisterial study of the sublime, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, the pertinent subtitle "the development of the aesthetics of the infinite." Previously, in the mid-seventeenth century, the French mathematician Blaise Pascal was moved to portray the human condition itself as sublime, perpetually suspended between two infinities, recognizing that the microscopic, too, can elicit sublimity. Mortality itself regularly appears on the inventory of extremities – somber reflections on death and eternity become a popular theme of the midcentury "graveyard" school of poetry. Such encounters with the infinite provoke responses almost innumerable in their diversity. In eighteenth-century English poetry, sensations of the sublime run the gamut from gloom to glory, from elation through "Philosophick Melancholy" to awe and terror. Pascal records one reaction when he gazes into the abyss of space: "the eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me" (Pascal 1995: 73).

We can sketch the philosophical problems that the rendezvous with infinity poses by asking whether any encounter between a finite perceiver and a perceived infinite is even possible, and if not, what it is precisely that "occurs." It could well be argued that the sublime encounter never actually takes place; rather, the perceiver devises a proxy for infinity and the ingenuity of this ruse is what yields the experience of the sublime. If we accept that the sublime is a failed or "ruined" encounter that must be retrieved by some factitious subterfuge, we may begin to understand why ruins *and* their aesthetic salvation by the spectator play such a prominent role in eighteenth-century poetry of the sublime. The prototype for this motif of ruin is the famous poem by Sappho (*c.*650 BCE) to a young girl (*Phainetai moi . . .*), quoted in the classical treatise that originated the concept of the sublime. What she dramatizes is how she had been shattered by desire, her tongue broken; but the poem itself pieces the splintered self back together into an aesthetic whole (quoted in Longinus 1965: 114; Hertz 1985). The collision with the sublime yields a survivor-narrative. We find many examples and motifs of ruin in the sublime poetry of the eighteenth century, but they might well be read as allegories of the sublime encounter itself – the shattering blast of the infinite followed by its aesthetic recuperation.

Much theoretical dispute has revolved around where precisely the sublime resides: in the perceiving subject, in the perceived object, or somewhere in the fusion between the two. In fact, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in 1790 argued that the sublime occurs when a finite, apprehending subject comprehends his concealed infinity, an instance of (self-)revelation already hinted at by Baillie and claimed by the poet Edward Young, in his essay *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), as the source of poetic genius, the discovery of the infinite depth of the creative self (Kant 1987; Young 1966). I preserve the masculine pronoun since the eighteenth-century sublime tends to be a very male business; Barbara Freeman has made a persuasive critique of the masculinist and misogynist biases of eighteenth-century sublime discourse (Freeman 1995). In one shape or another, however, the principal focus for

theories of the sublime from Longinus to Kant and since has been how one keeps an appointment with infinity.

If we accept that the sublime is a mode of aesthetic encounter with infinity, we need to be mindful of the dual sense of the aesthetic in this definition: an older sense embedded in its Greek etymology, describing *any* act of perception, as well as its later-eighteenth-century and modern usage, which refers to characteristics of the fine arts and literature. Thus both an astronomer contemplating the vastness of space and a reader transported by a stirring passage of poetry might equally claim to experience the sublime. The first is often called the *natural* sublime; the second we shall call the *rhetorical* or textual sublime. Although eighteenth-century poetry shared with literature, music, and the fine arts the vogue for the natural sublime, one should not repeat Baillie's mistake of supposing that the rhetorical sublime was merely a servant of the natural sublime, that "the sublime in writing is no more than a description of the sublime in nature" (Ashfield and de Bolla 1996: 88). The distinction between the sublime idiom itself and critical discourse about the sublime should be self-evident; when Baillie sketches the hallmarks of the sublime one would no more suppose that his prose produces the sensation of the sublime than the present essay does. Emily Dickinson, probably echoing Sappho, offers one of the most memorable descriptions of the rhetorical sublime: "If I read a book {and} it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know *that* is poetry. If feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry" (Dickinson 1958: vol. 2, 473–4). In the literature of the eighteenth century, the sublime is a category that straddles the distinction between Art and Nature in a way that often seems confused, but also frequently casts light on the qualities and values associated with these two profoundly complex critical terms in this period.

It is generally agreed that the concept of the sublime is a classical one whose roots can be traced back to a short, fragmentary, and enigmatic manuscript of uncertain authorship from the first century BCE. Entitled *Peri Hupsous* in Greek, commonly translated as *On the Sublime*, it has wrongly been attributed to "Longinus," or sometimes "Pseudo-Longinus," though the author remains unknown; for simplicity's sake, I keep the name Longinus here. The considerable difficulties involved in translating *hupsous* as "sublime" can be set aside here. Certainly, the renewed interest in the category of the sublime in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is initially provoked by the reappraisal of Longinus' treatise and Nicolas Boileau-Despreaux's fanciful French translation and commentary in 1674.

The concept of the "sublime" takes on a new energy and prominence in the eighteenth century, such as to render it, along with the very category of the aesthetic itself, a new and modern paradigm through which to recognize and appraise artistic expression – one almost unrecognizable to classical and medieval rhetoric, where the priorities had been to please and instruct. There is scant evidence to suggest that the medieval period possessed anything like the secular idea of the sublime; rather, it acquires a new currency in the seventeenth century and becomes progressively consolidated through the eighteenth century, culminating in the rich and conceptually intricate account offered by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790).

Peri Hupsous began circulating in Latin translation in western Europe in the sixteenth century, but was known to only a few scholars. Following Boileau's translation, the concept of the sublime entered European aesthetic discourses to stay. However, the main focus of Longinus' treatise was rhetoric, or the sublimity of words. In 1712, Joseph Addison still placed some emphasis on a rhetorical sublime. "Words, when well chosen, have so great a Force in them, that a Description often gives us more lively Ideas than the Sight of Things themselves" (*Spectator*, no. 416, in Addison and Steele 1965: vol. 3, 560). This stress on the sublime effects of words was soon abandoned, however, in favor of a focus on the characteristics of sublime experiences and objects.

The priorities of the eighteenth century can be measured by Edmund Burke's seminal investigation of 1757, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. The discussion of sublimity in language is tacked on almost as an afterthought in Part V of his *Enquiry*, suggesting the receding importance of the rhetorical sublime during the period. Kant, in the fullest statement on the sublime to emerge from the eighteenth century, is barely interested in literature at all. In its stead emerges an attention first to the religious sublime and, through its mediation, the ushering forth of the natural sublime. The attention to the natural sublime in the eighteenth century signals the locus of the divine in a minor key, appropriate to an age (the Age of Reason, the Age of Enlightenment, etc.) grown increasingly secular, rationalistic, and generally more circumspect about theological matters. However, theories of the sublime still fail to switch comfortably from rhetoric to nature, from the textual to the nontextual or extratextual. This distinction collapses in the issue of *representation*. Both the textual sublime and the natural sublime ultimately depend upon an idiom of representation, whether this be linguistic representation (rhetoric) or representation mediated through some perceptual or ideational apparatus like the Imagination as it apprehends a sublime object (nature).

The flourishing interest in the sublime stems indirectly from the epistemological urgencies of the epoch: preoccupations with the range of reason, knowledge, and intelligibility. Within the purview of such priorities, the category of the sublime – whether we characterize it as the religious sublime, the natural sublime, the mathematical sublime, or the dynamic sublime – occupies and marks out a space of unintelligibility, the point where reason and knowledge are exceeded and confounded. The sublime marks the place of the infinite within the ambit of a reason curtailed by finitude; it emerges there as the "other" of reason, and functions therefore as the category through which the limits of reason might be summoned, staged, investigated, and analyzed. More paradoxically, the sublime was a category for striving to represent the unrepresentable and for understanding how phenomena and experiences might escape understanding. Joseph Addison nicely captures the quixotic quality of the enterprise when he writes: "Our Imagination loves to be filled with an Object, or to graspe at any thing that is too big for its Capacity" (*Spectator*, no. 412, in Addison and Steele 1965: vol. 3, 540). The sublime might,

therefore, be described as one device through which rationality measured its own limits in the Age of Reason.

It is regrettable that Samuel H. Monk's classic study, still one of the best surveys of eighteenth-century theories of the sublime, should speak of the "confused seas of English theories of the sublime" and assign to Kant the task of piloting us out of this tempest: "It was given to Kant to bring order out of chaos" (Monk 1935: 6, 5). Several critics have noted that the unintended effect of Monk's synopsis of the eighteenth-century British sublime has been to inhibit an assessment of these early theories on their own terms, and to regard them instead as rough drafts for Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. This teleological fallacy must be discarded if one is to come to any appreciation of what the earlier literature of the sublime accomplished on its own terms.

One can only speculate about what new social and cultural alignments might have created the vogue for the sublime in the eighteenth century, and what conditions had ripened to permit the enthusiastic reception of a classical treatise on the sublime around the beginning of the eighteenth century. The original application of the quality "sublime" arose in Longinus' discussions of Homer's *Iliad*, Sappho, and the moving opening periods of the Book of Genesis. The Homeric poems and Virgil's *Aeneid* remained the models for the epic form in the eighteenth century, and when an emergent national sentiment for the first time prompted the need to promote a *national* literature, the English literary community turned to Milton's magisterial epic, *Paradise Lost*. Milton's poem at once became the authoritative example of the sublime in English poetry, while also providing the template for any eighteenth-century English poet attempting the epic form. Joseph Addison, in his early *Spectator* papers on *Paradise Lost*, was instrumental in promoting Milton's reputation in this regard. As early as 1694, Addison had written in his poem "An Account of the Greatest English Poets":

> What-e'er his pen describes I more than see,
> Whilst ev'ry verse, array'd in majesty,
> Bold, and sublime, my whole attention draws,
> And seems above the critick's nicer laws.
> (ll. 64–7, in Addison 1721: vol. 1)

Addison's assertion that sublime poetry can bypass the "nicer Laws" of criticism is an evident allusion to Longinus' reflections on Homer. With this acknowledgment, he already recognizes that sublime subjects were one means of circumventing the strictures of neoclassical poetics. His subsequent *Spectator* papers on *Paradise Lost* offer a more measured and critical appraisal of the poem, but on balance still affirm that "*Milton*'s Sentiments and Ideas were so wonderfully sublime" (*Spectator*, no. 297, in Addison 1965: vol. 3, 62).

In addition to Boileau and Addison, the other figure to be credited with reanimating Longinus' concept of the sublime in Britain is the critic John Dennis – "Sir Tremendous Longinus" as he was scornfully named by those such as Pope, Gay, and

Swift who did not share his enthusiasm for the sublime. In 1704 Dennis published *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, an essay notable for championing Longinus and Milton, as well as predicting enduring trends of poetic and aesthetic taste in the later eighteenth century. [*See* ch. 5, "POETIC ENTHUSIASM."] For Dennis, the proper destiny of literary language remains devotional: poetic language had spilt nearest to God after the Fall, and "Poetry has been thought not only by Heathens, but by the Writers of the Old Testament, and consequently by God himself who inspir'd them, to be the fittest Method for the enforcing Religion upon the Minds of Men" (Dennis 1939–43: vol. 1, 373). It follows that poetic diction is inherently disposed to produce the sublime.

In Dennis's account, religious ideas are the indispensable source of sublimity: "never any Passage had all these Marks [of sublimity] . . . unless it were Religious" (Dennis 1939–43: vol. 1, 361); however, as the century unfolds, the religious tinctures of the sublime will slowly fade, leaving behind a nature suffused with meaning, the *natural* sublime. This is not to imply that devotional poetry disappears; rather, it establishes a lively parallel tradition that persists through the eighteenth century. It should be underscored that Nature is never quite itself in the natural sublime, but always a vehicle, a medium for some other freight of meaning: that is, finite nature becomes an expression of infinity, divinity, spirit, the essence or *nature* of nature. Thus Addison can write in *Spectator* no. 412 on the "Vast" that "a spacious Horison is an Image of Liberty" (Addison and Steele 1965: vol. 3, 541). This correlation of an expansive and sublime spatial prospect with political, social, or imperial values becomes a major feature of eighteenth-century landscape poetry.

For Dennis, the sublime encounter is measured by the violence of emotional agitation it provokes, an axiom that inevitably led to much bombastic fishing for sublime effect: "For the Spirits being set in a violent Emotion, and the Imagination being fir'd by that Agitation; and the Brain being deeply penetrated by those Impressions, the very Objects themselves are set as it were before us" (Dennis 1939–43: vol. 1, 363). From such a conception, it comes as no surprise that *terror* and cognate affective states become the natural habitat of the sublime. Already apparent here is how the natural and rhetorical sublime overlap in the idiom of representation; in this encounter with the natural sublime, the brain, like a wax tablet, is forcefully engraved with "Impressions" which reproduce the object, "set as it were before us." What is notable through all English formulations of the sublime in the eighteenth century is the emphatic presence of sentiment and passion. Sentiment, above all, distinguishes the English discourse of the sublime from Kantian aesthetics, which enshrined the quality of *disinterestedness*.

In addition to Milton, the two other influential sources of the sublime for English poetry were, of course, Shakespeare and the solemn, orotund periods of the 1611 King James Bible. Indeed, the Bible became such a mine for sublime and devotional poetry that paraphrases of biblical texts abound in the eighteenth century. [*See* ch. 4, "POETRY AND RELIGION."] The hymnodist Isaac Watts, in his *Horae Lyricae* (1706), was among the first to draw directly from the Bible for the sublime. Others followed,

including Edward Young – one of the most prolific votaries of the sublime in poetry – with *A Poem on the Last Day* (1713) and the later "Paraphrase on Part of the Book of Job" (1719). Scenes from the Book of Job and from Revelation were among the most popular subjects for sublime treatment. In 1721, Aaron Hill composed *Judgment-Day, A Poem*, and in 1742, Pope's last version of *The Dunciad* offers its own angry and disturbed vision of apocalypse. The sublimity of the Bible received further promotion from philological scholarship which drew attention to the formal and *poetic* characteristics of the ancient Hebrew, arguing that it possessed literary qualities superior to the much venerated, but pagan, Homer; indeed, Milton had already asserted the superiority of the scriptures over the literature of Greece and Rome in *Paradise Regained* (my thanks to Wayne Ripley for this point). In 1741 Robert Lowth, Professor of Poetry at Oxford, delivered his famous lectures on the sacred poesy of the Hebrews, later published as *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (1753). Along with the Old Testament prophets, David, the poet-king, became a revered model for constructing the sacred and political authority of the poet as *bard*. In the 1760s Christopher Smart, who certainly knew Lowth's lectures, published several poems in imitation of Old Testament works, among which are *A Song to David* and *Translations from the Psalms of David*, as well as the strange, quasi-psalmic poem *Jubilate Agno*. [*See* ch. 21, "CHRISTOPHER SMART, *JUBILATE AGNO*."] Later in the century, William Cowper, also working in the vein of devotional poetry, composed his *Olney Hymns* cycle of sixty-seven poems. Finally, further developing the religious lineages of the sublime, come William Blake's major poems of the 1790s.

In 1757 Edmund Burke, reprising Dennis, codified the eighteenth-century English sublime with this synopsis: "terror is in all cases whatsoever . . . the ruling principle of the sublime" (Burke 1987: 58). Burke's *Enquiry* then proceeds to formulate the major motifs of the sublime. His work reads like an inventory of the themes and motifs we encounter in eighteenth-century poetry aspiring to the sublime idiom. Torment, terror, and death figure prominently. To these, Burke will add obscurity, power, vastness, magnificence, difficulty, suddenness, and privation – citing in the last category vacuity, darkness, solitude, and silence. Indeed, solitude – the figure of the lonely and alienated poet – will become one of the primary vehicles for the sublime in poetry (Sitter 1982). Also to be gathered under the rubric of privation is the figure of ruin although, strangely, Burke hardly stresses this feature.

We have already met several of the main figures in the eighteenth-century discourse of the sublime, among them Edward Young, Christopher Smart, and William Cowper. Others commonly associated with this idiom in poetry are James Thomson, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith, and Thomas Gray, as well as some lesser-known poets including Isaac Watts, Aaron Hill, John Dennis, Richard Blackmore, Mark Akenside, and Robert Blair. And beyond this there are several others who also formally express the aesthetics of the infinite, or achieve a rhetorical sublimity in other ways, such as Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and even Samuel Johnson (in both his prose and his verse). In the remainder of this short survey, I discuss some examples to illustrate the range of the idiom of the sublime.

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A typical midcentury attempt to summon the *frisson* of the sublime through the evocation of death and the provocation of terror illustrates several common features of the eighteenth-century sublime:

> the Task be mine,
> To paint the gloomy Horrors of the *Tomb*;
> . . . —The Grave, dread Thing!
> Men shiver, when thou'rt nam'd: Nature appall'd
> Shakes off her wonted Firmness.—Ah ! how dark
> The long-extended Realms, and rueful Wastes!
> Where nought but Silence reigns, and Night, dark Night,
> Dark as was *Chaos*, ere the Infant Sun
> Was roll'd together, or had try'd his Beams
> Athwart the Gloom profound.
> (Blair 1973: ll. 4–5, 9–16)

In the very act of naming its subject – the grave – Blair's 1743 poem also fussily coaches the reader's response, "Men shiver, when thou'rt nam'd." Then, as if this universal shudder were not enough, we read its escalation in the rhetorical figure most habitually associated with the sublime: *personification* (Knapp 1985). The poem adds, "Nature appall'd / Shakes off her wonted Firmness." The image of nature itself all atremble marks the apogee of the poem's sublime gambit. These moments of hyperbole are at once the fire and the potential pyre of the sublime, as Longinus had already cautioned in *Peri Hupsous*. Such tropes can raise the sublimity of the work, or they can destroy it. The sublime figure courts the fate of Icarus: if it soars too high, it risks plummeting into bathos. As early as 1728, Pope satirized some of the more bombastic and purple passages of his peers in his parody of Longinus, *Peri Bathous, or the Art of Sinking in Poetry*.

Not unexpectedly, "gloom," "silence," and vacant "wastes" are all frequent metonymic kin to death and among the usual accomplices of the sublime idiom. Also already evident in this poem is the speaker's isolation in his grim and melancholy "task." As we have noted, Burke cites solitude and privation among the principal hallmarks of the sublime. These features persist well into the nineteenth century to demarcate an almost cosmic degree of alienation in such instances as Coleridge's "extreme silentness" in "Frost at Midnight" or "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Here the sublime arises from an absolute sensation of abandonment and anguish that might as well be infinite; as noted earlier, the biblical Book of Job, in which the protagonist seems discarded by God himself, was a popular subject for sublime poetry in the eighteenth century (Lamb 1995). Edward Young had previously made this association of the sublime with darkness and abandonment the very germ of his poem *Night Thoughts* (1742–5), which begins at night when "Creation sleeps" ("Night I", l. 23, in Young 1989) and only the speaker, implicitly an outcast from Creation itself, remains awake.

The opening lines of Gray's famous *Elegy in a Country Church Yard* also brilliantly evoke this profound sense of solitude with the vision of a cosmos distributed between poet and shadow:

> The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
> The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
> The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
> And leaves the world to darkness and to me.
> (ll. 1–4, in Lonsdale 1969)

Finally, in his bitter tirade against modernity and mass culture, *The Dunciad* (1742), Pope reprises Longinus' famous illustration of the sublime in his own unwriting of the opening verses from Genesis:

> Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS! is restor'd;
> Light dies before thy uncreating word:
> Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
> And Universal Darkness buries All.
> (Pope 1939–69: vol. 5, iv. 653–6)

One of the first successful poets in the new idiom of the natural sublime was **James Thomson**, with his long, loco-descriptive poem *The Seasons* (1730) [*see* ch. 14, "JAMES THOMSON, *THE SEASONS*"]. The poem offers several, alternative accesses to the sublime. The first type of sublime is a quiet elation of being stemming from the introspective contemplation, or even mere sensation, of the natural world as vehicle and expression of God. The tenor of these passages is brooding and somber, tinged with melancholy. Scattered particulars of time, place, setting, and mood suddenly coalesce in the sensation of a presence revealing itself: "He comes! he comes! in every Breeze the POWER / Of PHILOSOPHIC MELANCHOLY comes!" ("Autumn," ll. 1004–5, in Thomson 1981). Visceral sensations find coherence and body in this elusive but proximate external figure:

> His near Approach the sudden-starting Tear,
> The glowing Cheek, the mild-dejected Air,
> The soften'd Feature, and the beating Heart,
> Pierc'd deep with many a virtuous Pang, declare.
> ("Autumn," ll. 1006–9)

A second variety of the sublime articulated by *The Seasons* mobilizes the psychodrama of terror identified by Dennis and later analyzed by Burke. We might call this the *sacrificial* or tragic sublime – a mode to which tragedy owes much of its power. Accepting Dennis's claim that an infinite menace incites a corresponding terror – "none are so terrible as those which shew the Wrath and Vengeance of an angry God" (Dennis 1939–43: vol. 1, 361) – the logic of the sacrificial sublime would dictate that the

most intense affect arises directly in the path of terror. However, a finite being in the precincts of infinite force would theoretically be blasted to oblivion. For this very reason, Burke recognized the necessity of an interval between the menace and the menaced, or a sacrificial proxy, so that the attendant emotion is not unadulterated terror and imminent destruction: "when danger or pain press too nearly, they . . . are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications . . . they are delightful" (Burke 1987: 40). Thomson intuitively grasps this principle by sharply distinguishing victim and spectator. The sacrificial or tragic sublime offers up a "scapegoat" whose own fate actually nourishes the sense of the sublime among its witnesses. Thus Thomson observes: "How many shake / With all the fiercer Tortures of the Mind, / Unbounded Passion, Madness, Guilt, Remorse," but then adds, "They furnish Matter for the Tragic Muse" ("Winter," ll. 338–40, 342). The sacrificial sublime is well illustrated by the fate of a shepherd in "Winter":

> As thus the Snows arise . . .
> In his own loose-revolving Fields, the Swain
> Disaster'd stands;
> . . .
> Nor finds the River, nor the Forest, hid
> Beneath the formless Wild; but wanders on
> From Hill to Dale, still more and more astray;
> . . .
>   How sinks his Soul!
> What black Despair, what Horror fills his Heart!
> . . .
> The deadly Winter seizes; shuts up sense;
> And, o'er his inmost Vitals creeping cold,
> Lays him along the Snows, a stiffen'd Corse.
>   ("Winter," ll. 276,
>   278–9, 282–4, 288–9, 318–20)

This scene takes the emotions and estrangements of the sublime and intensifies them, pushing them to their logical conclusion, the frantic terror of the hapless swain. Through identification with the shepherd, the reader/spectator becomes his affective counterpart, yet remains happily spared his grim fate. In the spectacle of the shepherd's "ruin" lies the germ of the spectator's own sense of sublimity. Experiences united in one persona in Sappho's poem have here been parsed into their constituent parts. The poetry of ruin, loss, privation, and the fragmentary might be construed as a subset of this genre of the sublime; the ruin records the aftermath of the sublime encounter, a monument to the shattering non-encounter of finite and infinite.

Thomson's poem participates in the poetics of the sublime in another conspicuous capacity: through the common device of the prospect-view, he mobilizes a sociologi-

cal or *demographic* sublime, a convention that became highly popular in topographic and loco-descriptive poems for mapping the changing geographies of modernity and for fanning the fires of patriotism (Barrell 1983). The twin accomplishments and destinies of Britain as nation and empire are extolled. The last several hundred lines of "Summer" are a sustained excursion into this chauvinistic sublime; this extract conveys the flavor of these prospects as they take inventory of the expanding geographies of nation and empire:

> HEAVENS! what a goodly Prospect spreads around,
> Of Hills, and Dales, and Woods, and Lawns, and Spires,
> And glittering Towns, and gilded Streams, till all
> The stretching Landskip into Smoke decays!
> Happy BRITANNIA! where the QUEEN OF ARTS,
> Inspiring Vigor, LIBERTY abroad
> Walks, unconfin'd, even to thy farthest Cotts,
> And scatters Plenty with unsparing Hand.
> ("Summer," ll. 1438–45)

The unsparing portrait of abundance and plenty continues in the same vein:

> Thy crouded Ports,
> Where rising Masts an endless Prospect yield,
> With Labour burn
> . . .
> BOLD, firm, and graceful, are thy generous Youth,
> By Hardship sinew'd, and by Danger fir'd,
> Scattering the Nations where they go; and first
> Or on the listed Plain, or stormy Seas.
> ("Summer," ll. 1461–3, 1467–70)

And Thomson reprises these sentiments in the coda to "Summer":

> ISLAND of Bliss! amid the subject Seas,
> That thunder round thy rocky Coasts, set up,
> At once the Wonder, Terror, and Delight,
> Of distant Nations; whose remotest Shore
> Can soon be shaken by thy Naval Arm,
> Not to be shook thyself, but all Assaults
> Baffling, like thy hoar Cliffs the loud Sea-Wave.
> O THOU! by whose Almighty *Nod* the Scale
> Of Empire rises, or alternate falls,
> Send forth the saving VIRTUES round the Land,
> In bright Patrol: white *Peace*, and social *Love*;
> ("Summer," ll. 1595–1605)

Such rousing and plangent strains from the poet of "Rule, Britannia!" urged on Britain's imperial aspirations. These passages provide good illustration of the patriotic sublime in its most confident and unapologetic voice. [*See* ch. 2, "POETRY, POLITICS, AND EMPIRE."]

*

Edward Young is perhaps the most boisterous and untiring voice of an aesthetics of the infinite during the eighteenth century. His long poem in nine books, *Night Thoughts* (1742–5), an immensely popular work of didactic devotional poetry once poised to rival Milton's *Paradise Lost*, blares the sublime's loudest hour. Replete with stage thunders, stylistic bombast, and metaphysical conceits yoked together by violence, it marshals all conceivable rhetorical bunting and pageantry to its cause. The "aesthetics of the infinite" threads through every aspect of the poem's meditations on the riddles of mortality and immortality.

The poem's main objective is to persuade its addressee, Lorenzo, from a life of dissipation and religious skepticism to a life of moral reform and Christian faith. Young's central argument derives from the concept of the sublime to be articulated by Baillie a couple of years later. As we have seen, the sublime is frequently claimed to be an instrument of self-revelation, drawing the soul's hidden powers from itself. Young anticipates Baillie's observation that the sublime "gives [the soul] a lofty conception of her own powers" to argue that sublimity directs consciousness to its appointed destiny in eternity. The sublime discloses to the soul its own, recondite infinity, but the price of that destiny is moral and spiritual conversion. Indeed, the poem is a sustained attempt to provoke the soul to embrace its own, concealed sublimity. This oxymoronic structure of human nature, at once finite and infinite, allows Young to coin endless conceits, paradoxes, and conceptual reversals of the order, "*Helpless* Immortal! Insect *infinite*! . . . / . . . I tremble at myself, / And in myself am lost!" ("Night I," ll. 79–81). Mankind itself offers a spectacle of the sublime, and due reflection and introspection yield the opportunity for "contemplating our distant Selves" ("Night VI," l. 118).

As we saw earlier from the example of Sappho, the sublime often arises in figures of ruin, wreckage, fragmentation, and destruction, to the extent that these preserve the traces or stigmata of some overwhelming or infinite force. The ruin in the landscape became a popular arena for staging the sublime in poetry and gave rise to an entire sub-genre of ruin poems; Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and Shelley's "Ozymandias" are late expressions of this genre. Young's *Night Thoughts* gives this motif a novel twist by interpreting mortal existence as the potential ruin of eternity. *Night Thoughts* is the chronicle of a ruin foreseen and offers one of the boldest prolepses in English poetry. Thus, in his effort to dislodge his reader from moral complacency, Young is stirred to apostrophe: "O my Coëvals! Remnants of yourselves! / Poor human Ruins, tott'ring o'er the Grave!" ("Night IV," ll. 109–10; cf. "Night II," ll. 672–4, "Night III," l. 104). By apostrophizing the complacent, indifferent readers as "remnants of yourselves," he proleptically asserts an eternity squandered and the "human ruin" as

a *fait accompli*. He thus draws the concept of the complete self from another dimension and temporality, obliging the reader to admire at a distance, as well as mourn, his forsaken immortality:

How Great, in the wild Whirl of *Time*'s pursuits
To stop, and pause, involv'd in high Presage,
Through the long Visto [*sic*] of a thousand Years,
To stand contemplating our distant Selves,
As in a magnifying Mirror seen,
Enlarg'd, Ennobl'd, Elevate, Divine?
("Night VI," ll. 115–20)

In a clever shift of the spatial idiom, Time itself becomes the object of a sublime prospect-view, "the long Visto" into the Promised Land; the resolutely fallen reader can contemplate his missed opportunity, "Enlarg'd, Ennobl'd, Elevate, Divine."

*

William Collins is one of the mid-eighteenth-century poets most commonly associated with the aesthetics of the sublime, and yet his poetry manifests a more perplexing affinity with the sublime. His work is scant, but his 1746 *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects* are a milestone for the sublime in poetry during the period. In his study of the English ode, commonly a form for expressing lofty sentiment, Paul Fry has noted "the monotheism toward which all odes bend themselves," and has suggested that "the quest for the monistic center is most intense in Collins" (Fry 1980: 131, 100). Collins courts the union with this center in some moment of sublime rapture more fervently than his contemporaries and yet seems more cruelly disappointed; however, these failed epiphanies paradoxically yield a sublimity that is more candid, convincing, and psychologically complex than anything before them and thus begin to lay the foundations of Romantic subjectivity.

Collins's odes strive to compose a sublime and philosophic consciousness in dialogue with its literary precursors as well as reflecting critically and self-consciously on such a project. In the halting, hesitant persona that results, the fractured lyric subjectivity of modernity looms into legibility. This self-reflexive poetry about poetry is best exemplified in the intricate "Ode on the Poetical Character." The poet courts the sublime transport and vision as follows:

Young *Fancy* thus, to me Divinest Name,
To whom, prepar'd and bath'd in Heav'n,
The Cest of amplest Pow'r is given:
To few the God-like Gift assigns,
To gird their blest prophetic Loins,
And gaze her Visions wild, and feel unmix'd her Flame!
(ll. 17–22)

In a cognate fashion, appealing to the terror that Dennis had found most conducive to sublime sentiment, Collins in his "Ode to Fear" beseeches:

> O thou whose spirit most possessed
> The sacred seat of Shakespeare's breast!
> . . .
> Hither again thy fury deal,
> Teach me but once like him to feel:
> His cypress wreath my meed decree,
> And I, O Fear, will dwell with thee!
> (ll. 64–5, 68–71)

The ardent wish to feel the unmixed flame or dwell with fear point to a desire to collapse any distance or mediation between the sublime object and the feeling subject. However, it is precisely this rapturous union that is repeatedly thwarted in Collins's poems. The "Ode on the Poetical Character" narrates this poignant tale most fully; reflecting his sense of belatedness, the poet asks anxiously, "Where is the bard, whose soul can now / Its high presuming hopes avow?" (ll. 51–2). Finally, fearing that his precursor, Milton, marks the last generation to have joined a visionary company of sublime poets, he writes:

> High on some cliff to Heaven up-piled,
> . . .
> An Eden, like his own, lies spread;
>
> I view that Oak, the fancied Glades among,
> By which as *Milton* lay, His Ev'ning Ear,
> From many a Cloud that drop'd Ethereal Dew,
> Nigh spher'd in Heav'n its native Strains could hear:
> . . .
> With many a Vow from Hope's aspiring Tongue,
> My trembling Feet his guiding Steps pursue;
> In vain – Such Bliss to One alone,
> Of all the Sons of Soul was known,
> And Heav'n, and *Fancy*, kindred Pow'rs,
> Have now o'erturn'd th'inspiring Bow'rs,
> Or curtain'd close such Scene from ev'ry future View.
> (ll. 55, 62–6, 70–6)

Collin's prevailing sentiment, throughout these poems, derives from the pathos and anguish of arriving too late, to find "th'inspiring Bow'rs" closed to "ev'ry future View." The suggestion that the inspiring bowers now lie in ruin and that the sublime encounter has been missed, paradoxically intensify the sublime pathos of these lines. [*See* ch. 19, "William Collins, 'Ode on the Poetical Character,'" and 28, "The Ode."]

*

In Book Two of *The Task* (1784), entitled "The Time-Piece," **William Cowper** reprises the themes of ruin, human culpability, and God's wrath that have informed the British sublime from Milton forward. We have found examples of this aesthetic program promoted by Dennis and practiced by Edward Young. Although Cowper deploys familiar motifs and structures of the sublime, his focus is more sharply political, impugning an imperial destiny that was better defined and closer to being realized than it had been earlier in the century. It provides a stark contrast to the patriotic sentiments trumpeted by Thomson in the 1720s.

Cowper reflects on a contemporary event, an earthquake in Sicily which killed roughly forty thousand people; but this soon becomes the occasion of reflection once more upon the day of judgment. It is another version of the sacrificial sublime, but delivers a stern rebuke to the imperial English reader:

> Alas for Sicily! rude fragments now
> Lie scatter'd where the shapely column stood.
> Her palaces are dust.
> . . .
> From th' extremest point
> Of elevation down into th' abyss,
> His wrath is busy and his frown is felt.
> . . .
> Ocean has caught the frenzy, and, upwrought
> To an enormous and o'erbearing height,
> Not by a mighty wind, but by that voice
> Which winds and waves obey, invades the shore
> Resistless.
> (ii. 75–7, 92–4, 111–15)

Thus is the scene of destruction sketched and God's intervention into his own Creation evoked. However, it soon becomes clear that this is not the cruelty or injustice of God, but rather, a self-inflicted punishment of Man; having indulged the potential of this scene to arouse sublime terror, Cowper turns next to offer the moral gloss on the catastrophe:

> Such evil sin hath wrought; and such a flame
> Kindled in heav'n, that it burns down to earth,
> And in the furious inquest that it makes
> On God's behalf, lays waste his fairest works.
> (ii. 133–6)

This long passage detailing the sufferings of the tsunami victims is transposed into the idiom of the sublime as the manifestation of God's power and fury. The episode

does not close upon or exhaust itself in the unfolding, ephemeral moment, but instead becomes an omen or portent within the larger historical narrative of theodicy. Cowper steers the sufferings of the Sicilians home to his compatriots as a warning, exhorting them to atone for their accumulating imperial and geopolitical sins; he continues:

> What then – were they the wicked above all,
> And we the righteous, whose fast-anchor'd isle
> Mov'd not, while theirs was rock'd like a light skiff,
> The sport of ev'ry wave? No: none are clear,
> And none than we more guilty.
> . . .
> If [God] spar'd not them,
> Tremble and be amaz'd at thine escape
> Far guiltier England, lest he spare not thee.
> (ii. 150–4, 158–60)

This stentorian voice of the sublime was waning, however. As we approach the period of the Romantic poets and Wordworth's prescription that the poet simply be a "man speaking to men" and that he "adopt the very language of men" to find a "plainer and more emphatic" idiom of sentiment, we detect a shift in taste away from embodying the sublime in "loud" and tempestuous terms ("Appendix III," in Wordsworth 1992: 751, 747, 743). This modulation in the diction of the sublime emerges already here in Cowper, where the most sublime sentiment is recognized to inhere not in noisy bursts of admiration, awe, dithyrambic swoons, and "poetical Enthusiasm," but rather in a simple, home-spun language. It is also the adjustment to an "egotistical sublime" that discloses itself, not outside in great works of nature, but as the hidden treasure of the imagination and the subject's inner or affective life.

In this intimate, fireside scene from Book IV of *The Task*, "The Winter Evening," we encounter the sublime in *pianissimo*, with the self disclosed to itself through the experience of self-forgetting. Solitude, gloom, and sensory privation are once again the prevailing markers:

> Not undelightful is an hour to me
> So spent in parlour twilight; such a gloom
> Suits well the thoughtfull or unthinking mind,
> The mind contemplative, with some new theme
> Pregnant, or indispos'd alike to all.
> (iv. 277–81)

The signal achievement of the sublime here is something approaching Kant's notion of aesthetic *disinterestedness*, where all content, passion, or will is negated, and, in "indolent vacuity of thought," the mind remains quiescently watching the harmony of its own motions, "creating what I saw":

Me oft has fancy ludicrous and wild
Sooth'd with a waking dream of houses, tow'rs,
Trees, churches, and strange visages express'd
In the red cinders, while with poring eye
I gaz'd, myself creating what I saw.
Nor less amus'd have I quiescent watch'd
The sooty films that play upon the bars,
Pendulous, and foreboding, in the view
Of superstition prophesying still
Though still deceiv'd, some stranger's near approach.
'Tis thus the understanding takes repose
In indolent vacuity of thought,
And sleeps and is refresh'd.
. . .
Thus oft reclin'd at ease, I lose an hour
At evening, till at length the freezing blast
That sweeps the bolted shutter, summons home
The recollected powers, and snapping short
The glassy threads with which the fancy weaves
Her brittle toys, restores me to myself.
(iv. 286–98, 302–7)

In this remarkable analysis of sublime ecstasy (an *ek-stasis*, carrying the self outside itself, as the Greek conveys), Cowper fashions the conditions and the poetic diction that enable Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," where Cowper's "sooty films" become the "strangers" prefiguring the occulted self – Edward Young's "stranger within" (*Conjectures*) – whom the poet discovers in the motions of the imagination (ll. 452–6, in Coleridge 2001: part I). In similar fashion, Cowper's verses, speaking of "creating what I saw," enable Wordsworth's serene, almost valedictory lines in "Tintern Abbey":

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,

And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.
(ll. 94–112)

If there is to be any teleology, it is surely these majestic verses, rather than Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, that are the native harvest and habitation of a century of sublime expression in poetry.

See also chs. 4, "Poetry and Religion"; 5, "Poetic Enthusiasm"; 9, "Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 19, "William Collins, 'Ode on the Poetical Character' "; 20, "Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*"; 23, "William Cowper, *The Task*."

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38
Poetry and the City

Markman Ellis

In his long didactic poem *The Progress of Commerce*, Richard Glover (1712–85) celebrated the great wealth and power that trade brought to London.

> Bright ornament of Europe, Albion's pride,
> Fair seat of wealth and freedom, thee my Muse
> Shall celebrate, O LONDON: thee she hails,
> Thou lov'd abode of Commerce . . .
>
> (ll. 20–3, in Glover 1739)

Glover's panegyric traced the history of civilization from the birth of trade among the Phoenicians through to its climax in London. His vision of London's commercial splendor was inspired in part by Alexander Pope, whose descriptive poem *Windsor-Forest* (1713) also declaimed the city's glory as the seat of an empire built on trade rather than conquest.

> Behold! *Augusta*'s glitt'ring Spires increase,
> And Temples rise, the beauteous Works of Peace.
> I see, I see where two fair Cities bend
> Their ample Bow, a new *White-hall* ascend!
> There mighty Nations shall inquire their Doom,
> The World's great Oracle in Times to come;
> There Kings shall sue, and suppliant States be seen
> Once more to bend before a *British* QUEEN.
>
> (ll. 377–84, in Pope 1963)

Both poems established an analogy between the empires of Rome and Britain, which Pope underlined by using the Roman name "Augusta" for London. To some apologists, Glover among them, London was greater even than ancient Rome at its height. At the dawn of the eighteenth century, London not only was the most populous city

in Europe, with nearly half a million inhabitants, but also seemed to many the most grand and prosperous (Beier and Finlay 1986: 1–34). Among London's advantages, observed the French Huguenot writer Monsieur de Souligné (fl. 1710), was the "abundance of Diversions" the city affords, "far better than theirs" in ancient Rome. "The Conveniency alone of our *Coffee* and *Chocolate-Houses* go's beyond all the common Diversions they had *at Rome*" (De Souligné 1710: 155). London had few modern rivals either. Another Huguenot historian, Guy Miège (1644–1718), argued in 1699 that "For Stateliness, *London* may yield to *Paris*, but in point of Trade and Riches *London* far outdoes it" (Miège 1699: part 1, 150).

The foundation of London's wealth, commentators agreed, was commerce. "For *Pleasure*, or *Luxury*, *London* is a Magazine, where all is at hand, and scarce any Thing wanting that Money can purchase. Here is to be had, not only what *Europe* affords, but what is fetched by Navigation from the remotest Parts of the habitable World" (Miège 1699: part 1, 150, 152). To many commentators, the animated and convivial life of London seemed to offer a new model for experience: one based on modernity, on commerce, and on sociability. In seeking to describe and understand this new urban experience, eighteenth-century poets turned to the manners and morals of the city as a major theme of their work. But in their poetic estimations of this new affectual experience, poetic form too was remade. It is not excessive to say that the city was the crucible for poetic experiment in the eighteenth century. The experience of city life engendered a series of formal poetic experiments, hesitantly identified at the time as mock-georgic, mock-pastoral, and mock-heroic. Yet while these forms engaged enthusiastically with urban life, they also registered unease at some of its follies and excesses, expressing a strand of resistance to urban life that also found an outlet in poetic apologia for the life of rural retirement.

In the early eighteenth century, the lived experience of the city encompassed an innovative mode of sociable interaction. Miège observed that

> To improve Society, the life of Recreation, the *English* have, besides their usual and friendly Meetings called *Clubs*, the Conveniency of *Coffee-Houses*, more common here than any where else. In which all Comers intermix together, with mutual freedom; and, at a very easy Rate Men have the Opportunity of meeting together, and getting Acquaintance, with choice of Conversation, besides the Advantage of reading all foreign and domestick News. (Miège 1699: part 2, 19–20)

More recently, Raymond Williams has argued that in the late seventeenth century a "really distinctive order of settlement, implying a whole different way of life," began to emerge in London (Williams 1976: 47). A new view of the city developed which saw it as more than an accumulation of buildings, or a concentration of people; rather, the city was its society, a set of human interactions that made endeavors such as literature and poetry possible. In 1938, the city theorist Louis Wirth (1897–1952) described this emergent "way of life" as "Urbanism" (Wirth 1938). As a social entity,

Wirth argued, the city was, from the eighteenth century onward, characterized by a profoundly new sense of social heterogeneity and cultural hybridity that allowed its peoples to adopt segmentalized and specialized life-roles, that required an extended range of personal traits, and that allowed the inhabitants to adopt diverse forms of cultural life, occupations, and ideas. City dwellers became more specialized in their business, more sophisticated in their cultural expression, and more tolerant of cultural and religious diversity. Sophisticated and refined forms of behavior increasingly characterized urban – and hence "urbane" – life. But the same process that led to this urbane sociability weakened bonds of kinship and folk traditions, giving rise also to new feelings of rootlessness and alienation. Even in the city, this metropolitan social life was new: a transformation of urban experience that added up to that "apparently nonsensical phrase, the urbanization of the cities" (Vries 1984: 12). Literary evidence provides extensive confirmation of urbanism's affectual transformations. Furthermore, literary representations were crucial for the construction and dissemination of this nascent cultural ideology. Through the appropriation of older genres and the emergence of new genres, the profound changes wrought by urbanization were announced and described.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the dominant poetic representation of the city was that inherited from the popular satires of the seventeenth century. Verse satire had occupied a key role in the battle of the books during the revolution of the 1640s and 1650s, the plots and conspiracies of the Restoration, and the aristocratic coup of 1688. These tumultuous historical events had occasioned a war of words, in which many vulgar and plebeian forms of poetry had flourished [*see* ch. 27, "Verse Satire"]. In the first decade of the eighteenth century, satirists such as Ned Ward (1667–1731), author of *The London Spy*, continued to exploit the satirical potential of such verse. Estimating that the political zeal of Presbyterians and Whigs of his own time resembled that of the Puritans during the English Revolution, Ward modeled his long satirical poem *Vulgus Britannicus: or, the British Hudibrass* (1710) on Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1661–3), itself an attack on the Puritan cultural politics of the Interregnum and Restoration (Troyer 1946: 91–2). Ward inherited from Butler not only the verse form (loosely rhymed, weak narrative, mock-romance), but also the burlesque mode of vulgar travesty. *Vulgus Britannicus* takes as its topic the so-called Dr. Sacheverell affair of 1710, in which a Tory clergyman, prosecuted by the Whig administration for "high crimes and misdemeanours," was defended in the streets, in print, and in Parliament by a resurgent Tory interest. The poem satirizes the zealots of both sides, describing their enthusiasm in a jocular, undignified manner, trivializing their heated debates.

> The *Coffee Tables* now were spread,
> With all the worst that could be said;
> And the two Good old *Cause Asserters*,
> Read most by *Coblers* and by *Porters*;

Were by the Saints kind *Intercession*,
Receiv'd again on this Occasion.
(xi. 55–60, in Ward 1710)

In coffee-houses, Ward cautioned, men from low stations in life read poems, pamphlets, and newspapers, and by this means became embroiled in political debates about the Anglican Church and the state. Ward suggests that the habits of reading, embedded deep within the texture of urban life, transformed the politics of the common people. Ward's Hudibrastic verses not only depict but also versify the central urban conflict between the politics of language and political action.

Swift's City Poems

Jonathan Swift's famous city poems, "A Description of the Morning" (1709) and "A Description of a City Shower" (1710), exploited this dichotomy between the languages of poetry and politics in the city. Swift's burlesque pits the high poetic forms he imitates against the vulgar behavior he identifies in the city's popular culture. In this way, his city poems provide an excellent example of the fertilization of classical forms by the apparently vulgar energies of city life. Both poems were published in Richard Steele's *The Tatler*, the influential and innovative essay periodical which argued for the polite reformation of manners. Swift adapts a mode of descriptive verse associated generally with the neoclassical form of the georgic, specifically with Virgil's *Georgics*. In the four sections of "A City Shower," Swift describes the appearance and feeling of the city when a rainstorm is imminent, the destructive effects of the shower's deluge, and the characteristic response of the citizens to the threat, before finishing with a depiction of the torrents of water sluicing away a miasma of filth and rubbish. A "descriptive poem," as its name suggests, describes a particular place or event: an appropriate mode for urban topography. The poem is intensely particular, identifying individual streets and churches by name. However, its description of a rain shower is also general, describing in the folklore around weather forecasting, and the fussy response of a man of fashion, the citizen's conventional responses to rain (Swift 1937: vol. 1, 123–5, 136–9). Although descriptive poems were expected to elevate their subject, Swift gently mocks both the form and the city by depicting the essentially miscellaneous energies, and surprising dislocations, of urban life. In the refined context of *The Tatler*, Swift's city poems redirected the vulgar energies of the city satires toward a polite and ameliorative focus, expending as much energy in formal parody as in condemnation of urban manners.

The formal innovation of Swift's urban description proved enticing to many other later poets. John Bancks's "A Description of London" (1738) condensed it to a list, an incantation of the city's properties held together by the punning accidents of rhythm and rhyme:

Houses, Churches, mix'd together;
Streets, unpleasant in all Weather;
Prisons, Palaces, contiguous:
Gates; a Bridge; the THAMES irriguous.
(ll. 1–4, in Bancks 1738, vol. 1)

Mary Robinson's "London's Summer Morning" (1800) used Swift's iterative list structure to catalogue the aural landscape of city life. The poet asks:

Who has not waked to list the busy sounds
Of summer's morning, in the sultry smoke
Of noisy London?
(ll. 1–3, in Lonsdale 1989)

Lying in bed, Robinson's speaker is disturbed by the sounds drifting up from the street below: a chimney sweep's shrill bawl, a milkmaid rattling her pail, the dustman's cart, the cries of vegetable vendors. As morning proceeds, further evidence of the commerce of the city is afforded by the sights and sounds of shops opening and goods being put on display. While the poet sleeps, the great machinery of commerce, the energy of city life, throbs away. The influence of this inventory strategy, constructing the city as an apparently miscellaneous list of experiences and commodities, can be seen in Blake's "London" (1792), and in Book VII of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805), subtitled "Residence in London."

The Town Eclogue

Urban poetry was not only a descriptive catalogue of city life and manners, but also an experimental method. One of the major new forms of urban poetry in the eighteenth century was the "town eclogue," a direct descendant of Swift's polite rewriting of Hudibrastic city satires. In the classical form, derived from Virgil's *Eclogues*, an eclogue was a short pastoral poem, usually developed in a quasi-dramatic dialogue or soliloquy located in Arcadia, the *locus amoenus* or "pleasant place" conventionally identified with rural life and manners (Congleton and Brogan 1993). In the eclogue's elevation of the rustic life there was an implied denigration of the urban. By the early eighteenth century, the convention-bound quality of the eclogue made it a form particularly suitable for burlesque and parody, as evidenced by Swift's, Pope's, and Gay's parodies of Ambrose Philips's pastorals [*see* ch. 10, "JOHN GAY, *THE SHEPHERD'S WEEK*"]. Swift's letter to Pope of 1716 testifies to this burlesquing energy.

> There is a young ingenious Quaker in this town who writes verses to his mistress, not very correct, but in a strain purely what a poetical Quaker should do, commending her look and habit, etc. It gave me a hint that a set of Quaker pastorals might succeed, if our friend Gay could fancy it, and I think it a fruitful subject; pray hear what he says.

> I believe farther, the pastoral ridicule is not exhausted, and that a porter, footman, or chairman's pastoral might do well. Or what think you of a Newgate pastoral, among the whores and thieves there? (Swift 1911: 330)

Swift proposes that a burlesque of pastoral might engender several further kinds of urban pastoral. In fact, Swift had already published a poem he described as a "Town Eclogue" in *The Tatler*, no. 301, March 13, 1711. Here he relocates the pastoral to the gates of the Royal Exchange on Cornhill, in the heart of the commercial commotion of the City. The poem takes the form of a dialogue between Phillis, a shop-girl and seamstress, and Corydon, a young City lawyer from the Temple, who encounter each other toward the end of day in early spring. The light and breezy tone of the poem masks a darker moral drama. When Corydon questions Phillis's melancholy mood, Phillis answers that she has been unhappy since the day he seduced her. Ignoring her distress, Corydon plays the gallant and rake, complimenting her as the fairest of her trade, the most beautiful of the "Belles Mechanick" (l. 46), and assuring her that he has not forgotten their liaison. Phillis replies that she hasn't either: she is pregnant as a result, a further burden to add to her previous illegitimate son. The poem ends with Corydon inviting Phillis back to his rooms for wine and further debauchery, as around them the shops of the Exchange close up.

> And now on either Side, and all around,
> The weighty Shop-Boards fall, and Bars resound;
> Each ready Sempstress slips her Pattins on,
> And ties her Hood, preparing to be gone.
> (ll. 65–8, in Swift 1937: vol. 3)

The pleasantries of the pastoral mode highlight the harsher realities of urban manners, the liaison between lawyer and a seamstress advertising the instability of class hierarchies in the city.

In the following decade, poets associated with Swift's and Pope's Scriblerian circle wrote further examples of the town eclogue. John Gay published his town eclogue, "Araminta," in Steele's *Poetical Miscellanies* (1714), depicting a wealthy young woman lamenting the cruel reverses of flirtation and courtship. Like Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712–14), the poem takes seriously the complexities of manners within exclusive high-status social circles, and at the same time uses the pastoralized verse to make light of such concerns (Gay 1974: 83–6). Within a narrowly defined social circle, the gentle irony of the town eclogue is socially integrative, laughing its readers together by gently exposing the follies of high society. A minor vogue for such verses emerged in Gay's circle in the 1710s: further town eclogues were written by Gay, Pope, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), originally circulated only in manuscript [*see* ch. 13, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Six Town Eclogues* and Other Poems"].

The vogue for town eclogues reached its high point in the 1770s, when the form was adopted by a swarm of minor urban poets, including Daniel Hayes, John Ogilvie, Andrew Erskine, William Woty, Charles Jenner, Richard Fitzpatrick, and William Combe. These men all aspired to gentlemanly status in London, and used their poetry to declare their leisured genius, which they established through their attendance at key clubs and coffee-houses in the city's West End. Town eclogues in this mode did not expose the follies of high society, but instead ridiculed social and intellectual aspiration among the lower orders. Unlike the polite courtly form of Gay's and Montagu's town eclogues, these poems placed the languages of the city at the center of their interest. Many focused on the supposed ridiculous disparity between the vernacular of plebeian trades and high poetic diction. The anonymous poem *The Chimney-Sweepers* (1773) depicts a meeting between three chimney sweeps, Grim, Dingy, and Sooty-Dun, in Whitehall. The satire turns on the poet's artful rendering of their demotic speech, full of cant expressions, which they ironically use to describe their love for a maid, Moll Come-Dusty, and their work sweeping the "chimleys." Like the eclogues of Virgil and Theocritus, the poem ends with a singing competition. To underline that the poem is addressed to a high-status audience, the poet provides footnotes to explain the sweeps' mysterious argot, which otherwise might seem "ungrammatical and barbarous to the nicer critics" (Anon. 1773: 3). Similarly, William Woty (1731–91), in his town eclogue *The Estate-Orators* (1774), mocks the hyperbolic language used by auctioneers of real estate, ridiculing the way these propertyless men use the language of estate ownership and connoisseurship (Woty 1774). In this kind of town eclogue, the poet exploits the comic potential of the linguistic inconsistency between unlettered voices and their use of poetic diction. In satirizing the ambition for knowledge and finer feelings among the working poor and industrious middle classes, the poems express an anxiety about the social mobility evidenced by urban life.

The satirical force of these town eclogues is directed against urban folly, especially the affectation of high-status manners, refined feelings, or elite leisure interests, by people without solid claims to them. But such poems do not seem alive to the fact that they are embedded in the same historical nexus as the objects of their satire: the town eclogues and satires complain of the social mobility occasioned by urban life, yet their poetry depends on similar forms of urban life and manners for its production and consumption. In the second of the four *Town Eclogues* (1772) of Charles Jenner (1736–74), two old men, Avaro and Prudentio, meet on a park bench in St James's Park in the early spring. The scene is green and leafy, and recalls the genre's pastoral origins, but nonetheless the park is identified as being just two miles from the City, the centre of commerce. Venting their spleen about this "confounded town" (l. 16), these *nouveaux riches* complain about rising prices and the increasing threat of economic collapse. Where once a man's status was legible in his clothes, now all kinds of men dress up in expensive lace and gold brocade. Ambitious City merchants, they complain, who have made their fortunes in commerce and trade, now seek to emulate the manners and fashions of the higher echelons of society. That they are themselves examples of such men remains ironically unstated. For the elderly Avaro and

Prudentia, commerce and emulation, the forces that enrich the city, now represent a form of corruption and subversion of hierarchy.

Urban Georgic

Another fertile model for urban poetry was the georgic. Poets of the late seventeenth century turned to Virgil's *Georgics*, a descriptive poem about farming written between 37 and 30 BCE, as a powerful model for their own age [*see* ch. 29, "The Georgic"]. Virgil's poem, written after the death of Julius Caesar against a backdrop of great political instability in Rome, prophesied the restoration of civic order and stability under Augustus. English poets similarly celebrated the return of peace after the Civil Wars of the seventeenth century: the georgic's world of agriculture implied both a healthful attitude to work and a culture of stable civility (Chalker 1969: 4–8). The popular English georgics of the eighteenth century also emphasized the important role of the city and its markets. John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757), a poem on sheep husbandry and the wool industry, developed a substantial and enthusiastic panegyric to the wealth generated in the cities by the trade in woolen textiles, both in the wholesale markets and by urban consumers. Richard Glover's *Progress of Commerce* (1739), noted above, is a georgic on trade, the city, and its commercial practices.

The georgic, however, could also be adapted to describe urban life and manners. Following Swift, other poets developed more extensive mock-georgics, such as John Gay's *Trivia; Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716) and James Smith's *The Art of Living in London* (1768). Gay's *Trivia* gives instructions not in the art of husbandry, but in the manners encountered in the street. The peripatetic narrator allows the poem considerable movement around the various scenes afforded by the city. The walker is an observer of urban morals: "Here I remark each Walker's diff'rent Face, / And in their Look their various Bus'ness trace" (Gay 1974: vol. 1, ii. 275–6). In offering precepts on how to survive the urban experience, the poet encourages polite manners. One passage, for example, gives instruction about "To whom to give the Wall" – that is, about the manners associated with walking next to the wall, on the safer and cleaner edge of the street.

> Let due Civilities be strictly paid.
> The Wall surrender to the hooded Maid;
> Nor let thy sturdy Elbow's hasty Rage
> Jostle the feeble Steps of trembling Age:
> And when the Porter bends beneath his Load,
> And pants for Breath; clear thou the crouded Road.
> (ii. 45–50)

Polite conduct, Gay proposes, is a necessity rather than a luxury in city life, suggesting that civilized behavior, and indeed civilization, find their origin in the city. This refinement, he suggests, is not simply cowardice either:

> But when the Bully, with assuming Pace,
> Cocks his broad Hat, edg'd round with tarnish'd Lace,
> Yield not the Way; defie his strutting Pride,
> And thrust him to the muddy Kennel's side;
> He never turns again, nor dares oppose,
> But mutters coward Curses as he goes.
>
> (ii. 59–64)

In walking, Gay's *Trivia* finds a curiously anomalous position of observation, defining a "fairly precise class orientation as a golden mean between *nouveau riche* selfishness and idleness and the vulgar labours of the lower classes" (Woodman 1988: 88). Adopting this unusual vantage point, Gay allows the walker a powerful, and nearly unique, description of eighteenth-century urbanism.

However, *Trivia* consistently ironizes, and deflates, the potential for sincere moral reform. Every sentiment is gently mocked by bathos: the walker is as worried by spatters of mud and dust as he is solicitous of blind beggars. The poet advises walkers to beware of tradesmen who might dirty their clothes:

> The little *Chimney-sweeper* skulks along,
> And marks with sooty Stains the heedless Throng;
> . . .
> The *Chandler*'s Basket, on his Shoulder born,
> With Tallow spots thy Coat; resign the Way,
> To shun the surly *Butcher's* greasy Tray.
>
> (ii. 33–4, 40–2)

The walker's city is an uncommonly dirty place: his progress is impeded by "heapy Rubbish" (iii. 336), the "kennels" (drains) overflow with ordure and muck, "Ungrateful Odours" emanate from the common sewers (i. 170–1). In a long mythological episode in Book II, the poem suggests the city's reigning deity is Cloacina, the goddess of the sewers. This association between dirt and the city has a moral dimension: the dirt makes manifest its latent corruption and immorality, just as the poem also provides evidence of the crime, prostitution, and disease encountered by the walker there. Yet the poem is not simply a documentary record of the city, employing a journalistic form of dirty realism. As Stephen Copley and Ian Haywood have suggested, *Trivia*'s mock-georgic mode strikes a complex tone of constantly shifting ironies that defy straightforward lines of interpretation. "This pattern of contradictions and ironic deferments," they argue, demonstrates the poem's "ideological confusion over the problems of representing and . . . celebrating the values of a commercial society" (Copley and Haywood 1988: 67). In using the georgic mode, with its complex tapestry of instance and illustration, interpretation and narrative, its distinctive kind of nonprescriptive description, *Trivia* argues that the opposing forces of refinement and dirt are in dialogue, at once mutually causal and intersupportive.

Retirement

In response to these new forms of urban poetry, and the polyvalent experience of the city itself, other poets expressed reservations and even resistance. One of the dominant metanarratives of eighteenth-century literary criticism was that the natural home of poetry was the rural environment. This argument derived from a particular view of history, which claimed that the first employment of mankind had been that of the shepherd, and concluded that the song of shepherds, the pastoral, was the original of poetry – hence the implication that "retirement" to rural life, with its capacity for leisure and reflection, was conducive to poetic genius. Pope, for example, praised country life in this way in his "Ode on Solitude" (1717):

> Happy the man, whose wish and care
> A few paternal acres bound,
> Content to breathe his native air,
> In his own ground.
> (ll. 1–4, in Pope 1963)

The retirement motif cast the city's bustling streets, devoted to commerce and politics, as inimical to poetic genius. Poets who resided in the city had either to retire to the country to find time and inspiration to write, or to find some way to imagine themselves away from the hustle and bustle of the city, perhaps in a quiet bower or grotto in the garden. William Cowper (1731–1800) expressed the argument with uncommon zeal in Book I of *The Task* (1785), where he praised the life of rural retirement, which allowed mankind to practice "The manners and the arts of civil life" (i. 596, in Cowper 1995). In contrast the city, driven by commerce and luxury, produced myriad forms of vice.

> In proud and gay
> And gain-devoted cities; thither flow,
> As to a common and most noisome sewer,
> The dregs and fæculence of ev'ry land.
> In cities foul example on most minds
> Begets its likeness. Rank abundance breeds
> In gross and pamper'd cities sloth and lust,
> And wantonness and gluttonous excess.
> In cities, vice is hidden with most ease,
> Or seen with least reproach; and virtue taught
> By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there
> Beyond th'atchievement of successful flight.
> (i. 681–92)

In the retirement conceit the city appears as the inevitable moral and physical antithesis of the country (Johnston 1984: 12–13; Williams 1973). The discourse

of retirement was reinforced by appeal to classical authority. Juvenal's Third Satire presented an urban-dweller's farewell to a corrupt city, making a vituperative attack on its morals. In his imitation of this poem entitled *London* (1738), Samuel Johnson followed Juvenal's model closely to condemn the commercialized ethics of the city, which he claimed had corrupted the morals of its citizens by encouraging luxury, flattery, and foreign fashions [*see* ch. 18, "SAMUEL JOHNSON, *LONDON* AND *THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES*"].

Poetry and Urban Print Culture

Although poets such as Pope and Cowper may have claimed to find the lived experience of the country a more fertile environment than the town for the composition of their verses, almost all eighteenth-century poetry, including Pope's and Cowper's, was produced in urban printing houses, and sold by urban booksellers through their networks of urban shops. In *The Task*, Cowper described London as a paradox:

> by taste and wealth proclaim'd
> The fairest capital of all the world,
> By riot and incontinence the worst.
> (i. 697–9)

In Cowper's paradox, urban life produced a great diversity of wealth and poverty, of politeness and vulgarity, of progress and atavism. Cowper considered *The Task* a defense of the virtues of rural life: he wrote of the poem that "the whole has one tendency," namely, "To discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London Life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue" (Cowper 1981: 285). Yet in the same period, September to November 1784, he kept up a spirited correspondence with his friend William Unwin, who acted as his agent with the London publishers, about publishing the poem in the city – though he expressed distaste for the literary market, complaining that "The Idea of being hawked about . . . is insupportable," and depicting his verses as reluctant participants on the commercial stage (pp. 286–7).

In *The Task*, Cowper modulated his attack on urban vices by admitting the important role of cities in the production of high culture:

> I do confess them nurs'ries of the arts,
> In which they flourish most. Where in the beams
> Of warm encouragement, and in the eye
> Of public note they reach their perfect size.
> (i. 693–6)

The book trade, which remained a predominantly urban, indeed London, phenomenon, grew in size and value in the eighteenth century (Raven 2001). Unlike many

other rapidly growing industries of the period, book production was not driven away from the city by the supply of raw materials and mechanized sources of power. Centers of the book trade in London, such as the booksellers' shops in St Paul's Churchyard, or the Chapter Coffee House, remained the premier marketplace for publishers, booksellers, wholesale paper merchants, printers, binders, and writers, including poets. Despite the burgeoning scholarship on the eighteenth-century book trade, only very recently has attention been given to poetry (Suarez 2001). [*See* ch. 7, "POETRY, POPULAR CULTURE, AND THE LITERARY MARKETPLACE."]

Many poets made themselves and their work known to the world through the urban sociability of clubs and coffee-houses. "Man is said to be a Sociable Animal," remarked Joseph Addison in *The Spectator*, no. 9 (March 10, 1711): the sociable instinct, he argued, was both the first cause and the greatest effect of modern city life. At every opportunity, Addison observed, men take the opportunity of forming themselves "into those little Nocturnal Assemblies, which are commonly known by the Name of *Clubs*." This rage for associative friendships in urban society, suggested Addison and Steele, epitomized a new and wholly original philosophy of urban life. Rather than the isolated and solitary existence experienced by the "savage," or the bonds of domination and obligation of feudal kingship, modern urban life was composed of civilized and refined social relations with fellow citizens, united as equals under the ties of trust, credit, and friendship (Addison 1965: vol. 1, 39). Poetry was nurtured by the new urban ideal of civil society, finding avenues for its production and consumption in clubs and coffee-houses. The emergent institutions of literary criticism also owed their form to this congenial urban sociability, through which they developed a new sense of the public consumption of poetry, and a social awareness of critical judgment. Although the conventions of anti-urban retirement continued to find expression in poetry through the century, the sociable practices of poets, publishers, and readers increasingly relied on urban ideals of civility, politeness, sociability, and commerce.

The growth and transformation of this new literary marketplace was concentrated in London, and to a considerable extent London came synecdochically to represent its problems. For many writers, including Swift and Pope, the transformation and expansion of the book trade was simply one expression of a wider political and moral atavism. The focus for such arguments and anxieties was the concept of "Grub Street." Both an image and an argument, Grub Street also referred to a real place, just outside the walls of the City, in a boggy area near to the Bethlehem Hospital for the Insane (Bedlam). In Johnson's *Dictionary*, Grub Street was described as "A street near Moorfields, much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries and temporary poems" (Johnson 1755). Grub Street was the center of an area of low-cost housing, particularly associated with poverty-stricken writers and publishers. In the imaginative geography of London, Grub Street was the home of "the hack," a writer who wrote for money and by order, like a hired horse and carriage. From its proximity to Bedlam, and its association with popular disturbances by the mob, the idea of Grub Street carried connotations of riot and madness (Rogers 1980; McDowell 1998).

In the final version of *The Dunciad*, Pope's long satire on the depravity of modern scholarship, science, and literature, Grub Street was the venue for "the cell of poor Poetry," the home of the Dunces.

> Close to those walls where Folly holds her throne,
> And laughs to think Monroe would take her down,
> Where o'er the gates, by his fam'd father's hand
> Great Cibber's brazen, brainless brothers stand;
> One Cell there is, conceal'd from vulgar eye,
> The Cave of Poverty and Poetry.
> Keen, hollow winds howl thro' the bleak recess,
> Emblem of Music caus'd by Emptiness.
> Hence Bards, like Proteus long in vain ty'd down,
> Escape in Monsters, and amaze the town.
> Hence Miscellanies spring, the weekly boast
> Of Curl's chaste press, and Lintot's rubric post:
> Hence hymning Tyburn's elegiac lines,
> Hence Journals, Medleys, Merc'ries, Magazines:
> Sepulchral Lyes, our holy walls to grace,
> And New-year Odes, and all the Grub-street race.
> (i. 29–44, in Pope 1999)

In Pope's cataclysmic vision, the environs of Grub Street extend to take in the poet's garret and the publishing houses, locations joined together by a flood of little poems, anthologies, and journals, a deluge of bad poetry by bad poets that threatens to annihilate judgment and taste. In Pope's "localisation of folly," as Pat Rogers calls it, the city is the "imperial seat of Fools" (Rogers 1980: 56–7). As a study of the urban topography of poetry, *The Dunciad* observes that poets live cheek by jowl with lunatics in Bedlam, with criminals, and with merchants, printers, and prostitutes. Pope encodes the ineluctable fact of urbanism, that man is a sociable animal, as an obscure but subversive threat to a nostalgic and pastoral rural idyll.

Through both the retirement conceit and the topos of Grub Street, eighteenth-century poets manufactured complex allegiances to country values, expressing admiration for simple bucolic manners, large country estates, and extensive leisure – all of which allowed them to disassociate themselves from the new literary marketplace, with its associations of modernity and commerce. Pope, for example, did much to shape the public perception of his suburban villa at Twickenham, a few miles outside London, as a country seat, whose (small) garden allowed him the leisured reflection of rural retirement. Nonetheless, Pope was intensely interested in the practical and commercial practices of the London book trade, and worked hard to stay within the urban sociability of printing, publishing, and bookselling (Foxon 1991; Mack 1969). So even though much city poetry of the mid-eighteenth century cultivated a careful disdain for urban life, it did so while remaining embedded within the city's public culture of coffee-houses, clubs, professions, societies, and pleasure gardens. Engaging

with the new literary marketplace, and with the characteristic sociability of modern city life, enabled or required the poets of the eighteenth century to revise received literary models and to experiment with new and hybrid forms.

See also chs. 2, "Poetry, Politics and Empire"; 7, "Poetry, Popular Culture, and the Literary Marketplace"; 13, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Six Town Eclogues* and Other Poems"; 18, "Samuel Johnson, *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*"; 26, "Epic and Mock-Heroic"; 27, "Verse Satire"; 29, "The Georgic."

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39
Cartography and the Poetry of Place

Rachel Crawford

The Compass Rose

The compass rose is the ornate medallion found on medieval and Renaissance maps. At its most intricate, its thirty-two symbolically tinted, gradated triangles crowned with a fleur-de-lis resemble stained glass. A sailor, however, would have viewed it more practically as the key to navigating coastlines by means of the sixteen quarter-winds (Campbell 1987: 395–6). What looks like a "mere decorative space filler, a hangover from the days when maps were more like illuminated manuscripts than communication devices" (Turnbull 1993: 50) enabled seamen to plot a course through the unknown. The term "compass rose" epitomizes the nature of all maps as objects alike of use, emblem, and beauty. In 1482 Francesco Berlinghieri captured with lyrical passion the emotional effect of looking at a map of uncharted territory. The map invites us to "leap up within ourselves, without the aid of wings, so that we may view earth through an image marked on a parchment. Its truth and greatness declared, we may circle all or part of it, pilgrims through the colour of a flat parchment, around which the heavens and the stars revolve" (quoted by Brotton 1997: 23).

I begin with the compass rose because of the bond it forms between function, emblem, and beauty in cartography. Because place and cartography inform each other, I wish to suggest the significance that cartographic principles may have for reading the poetry of place in the eighteenth century.

This brief chapter cannot provide an unbounded prospect of the places of eighteenth-century British poetry: its chorographic surveys, farms, and gardens; rivers, forests, cities, and ruins; homes and country houses; walks (usually at morning), bowers (usually at noon), and ascents (usually at evening). More realistically, it can complement the vast critical tradition of the poetry of place by examining the implications of poetic cartography. Laborer poems, georgics, and poems that chart the dimensions of human geography measure the abstractions of space. With scattered references to place-names, inventories of objects and qualities, or the worn paths of their daily

lives, British poets in the eighteenth century labored to transform Great Britain into a well-trodden place. They charted its geometry against the farthest reaches of the globe and within the more ambiguous spaces of work and home. The sections that follow focus closely on poems that demonstrate the intersections of cartography and the poetry of place: Anna Laetitia Barbauld's "An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley's Study" (date uncertain); three georgic poems – John Philips's *Cyder* (1708), James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730), and John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757); and finally Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour* (1739), a poem that marks with more than usual intensity the relations between abstract space and British place.

Emblematic Geography

Anna Laetitia Barbauld (Aiken, until her marriage in 1774) was prominent in literary circles as an accomplished poet and literary critic. One of her dearest friends, Mary Priestley, was the wife of the eminent chemist Joseph Priestley, often credited with having discovered, although not named, oxygen: what he called "dephlogisticated" or "good" air. Priestley is also noted, however, for his radical political activities, his experiments in the 1760s with electricity, and, following that, gases of all kinds, including carbon dioxide ("fixed air") and hydrogen. Barbauld's friendship with Mary Priestley would have enabled her to become deeply familiar with the Priestley family and Priestley's scientific work. Her poem, "An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley's Study" (not published until 1825), was most likely written during the period of Priestley's experiments with electricity and gases, which eventuated in his isolation of oxygen from air in 1774. The poem's playful and teasing tone demonstrates Barbauld's intimacy not only with Priestley's scientific and political activities, but also with the private territory of his study – a masculine place into which women were not lightly invited. In the poem, Barbauld circumnavigates a space wholly unfamiliar to us. Priestley's study starts to assume the contours of place as Barbauld transforms its contents into figures from her own classical training and her quotidian experience. She turns Priestley's study into an emblem of Priestley himself.

In this, "An Inventory" resembles a poem that Barbauld wrote during approximately the same period, shortly before or perhaps on the day of her wedding (Barbauld 1994: note, 273): "To Mr. Barbauld, with a Map of the Land of Matrimony." She accompanied this poem, which navigates the pitfalls and promises of marriage through the figure of a "sailor worn by toil and wet with storms" (l. 1), with an emblematic navigational chart. Although this map is now lost, the title reveals that it is part of a historical genre of sentimental maps dating from at least the fifteenth century that code emotional territory in the form of world maps. The matrimonial voyage Barbauld charts, with its "promised shore," its shoals of "jealous Doubt," the star of Hope, and telescope, or "Fancy's glass" (ll. 10, 13, 15, 17), parallels the inventory of Priestley's study: like the "Map of the Land of Matrimony," Barbauld's inventory uses a cartographical tradition to produce a human geography.

Barbauld begins her inventory of Priestley's study from the perspective of the armchair traveler:

> A map of every country known,
> With not a foot of land his own.
> A list of folks that kicked a dust
> On this poor globe, from Ptol. the First;
> He hopes, – indeed it is but fair, –
> Some day to get a corner there.
>
> (ll. 1–6)

Barbauld's entry into the poem through the figure of a map makes sense both culturally and personally, since it suggests the variety of ways that maps were drawn and used in the eighteenth century, from the purported objectivity of the coordinate projective map based on latitude and longitude to the most emblematic representations. The eighteenth century was, in fact, a time of intense fascination with maps of all kinds. Promoted by a vibrant print culture, maps had extraordinary cultural power, not only to chart navigational routes but also to satisfy intense curiosity about foreign lands fabricated in such popular tales as *A Thousand and One Nights* and documented in travelers' accounts of varying veracity. Thus, like the maps that preface each book in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, maps could combine known geographical contours with imagined places. They were also used more pragmatically: to advance domestic tourism, project territorial annexation, locate resources that could be transformed into exotic goods, and chart estates for taxation purposes. A century bustling with print culture turned the manufacture and dissemination of all such maps into a thriving trade.

The historical map, the first image in Barbauld's inventory of Priestley's study, predated the eighteenth century. However, like other kinds of maps, its development accelerated during that period (Goffart 2003: 131–2). Barbauld's initial image of "a map of every country known" suggests that she will chart the world of Priestley's study but also incorporate Priestley as an historical element in that map. Her facetious allusion to "Ptol. the First" refers directly to the founder of the Greek dynasty that ruled Egypt from the fourth until the first century BCE but also indirectly to the more renowned Claudius Ptolemy, who, as author of the second-century text *Geographia*, was considered the father of modern cartography.

Ptolemy's instructions for cartographical projections in *Geographia* revolutionized the Renaissance map industry upon its translation into Latin in the fifteenth century (Dilke 1987: 188–9; Brotton 1997: 31–32) and held imaginative power long after Copernicus's heliocentric revolution. His work was significant in its codification of a system of projective geometrical coordinates. The application of its principles quickened commercial aspirations among northern Europeans, whose terraqueous curiosity fueled the map and globe industry. *Geographia* also indirectly supplied a system for classifying regions by latitude and longitude so as to create inventories of prized

resources. Furthermore, as subsequent cartographic alterations proved, Ptolemy's central point of reference could be adjusted to suit political, commercial, or personal agendas. This is borne out by the Nuremberg globe (*c.* 1493), which was "one of the first definitively global geographical images to place Africa as central, rather than peripheral, to the political and commercial world of early modern Europe" (Brotton 1997: 69). Similarly, although the title of Barbauld's poem tells the reader that Priestley's study is the poem's central point of reference, the language of the poem reorients that point: rhetorically, Barbauld transfers the objects of his study into her capricious metaphors, thus constituting herself, the poet and affectionate but learned friend, as the point of orientation; metaphorically, she transforms the study itself into an emblematic representation of Priestley.

Barbauld clarifies the emblematic dimension of the wall map in a series of classifications that chart Priestley's aspiration to be placed more than figuratively on the globe. First are the historical luminaries whose miniatures would have been engraved on maps (Brotton 1997: 68). These include British kings, hung by a "packthread" (l. 8), perhaps like the portraits of kings that vertically flank edges of historical maps such as John Speed's *The Kingdome of England* (Albano 2001: 96–7). This same historical classification includes the religious, literary, and legal notables who, like those traced on his map, populate his library. The next classification consists of some of the tools of Priestley's landmark trade in electricity and gases: jars and phials "filled with lightning keen and genuine" (l. 19) and a precision thermometer. These are followed by his contemporary reading: "Sermons, or politics, or plays. / Papers and books, a strange mixed olio, / From shilling touch to pompous folio" (ll. 28–30).

The final classification includes his writings: correspondence, a "blotted proof-sheet" (l. 35) still wet from the printer, and, charmingly, schoolboy exercises. When taking note of his works-in-progress and manuscripts, however, Barbauld turns to language steeped in Milton and the classics to envision the plans and schemes that occupy the *terra incognita* of "heterogenous matter, / A chaos dark, nor land nor water" (ll. 39–40). "Embryo schemes" (l. 38) and the "new-born infants" (l. 41) of unbound books mark the borders of Priestley's world: his political writings are transmogrified into misshapen creatures "Like Cadmus' half-formed men" (l. 45), who "Were born with teeth, and sprung up fighting" (l. 54). Barbauld's inventory adroitly appropriates and deflates Priestley's world, drawing famous men (and his aspiration to join them), experiments, and political schemes into a language that cobbles the learned to the quotidian and the provocative to the droll.

Barbauld ends the poem abruptly and enigmatically:

"But what is this," I hear you cry,
"Which saucily provokes my eye?" –
A thing unknown, without a name,
Born of the air and doomed to flame.
(ll. 55–8)

The closing couplet sublimates the playful tone of the poem, speaks lyrically to Priestley's investigations, and uncovers the unspoken but most important purpose of her classification system, which, like the symbolic map of the atomic table, has the capacity to project "A thing without a name." The couplet exposes the imaginative power of the cartographer to etch regions beyond known boundaries – for the Greeks to project an Australia before an Australia had been sighted (Turnbull 1993: 41). This "thing," this yet unnamed gas "born of the air and doomed to flame," this real but imagined substance concludes an expedition that defines not only a place – a study in a home – but a man charted and placed by means of his intellectual aspirations.

What I have sketched here provides a way of construing place and poetry within the context of the emblematic uses of maps. Barbauld's human geography reveals an agenda that coordinate cartography conceals, as when a place is mapped as the body of a subject (Thongchai 1994: 133). The georgics that follow exemplify the point that, although mathematical neutrality authenticates coordinate cartography, it cannot avoid the social embeddedness that the human geography of Barbauld's poem discloses (Turnbull 1993: 19–20).

Coordinate Cartography

Georgic poetry was, from the first decade of the eighteenth century until approximately 1770, one of the most important sources for documenting a specifically British sense of place [*see* ch. 29, "The Georgic"]. Ideally it did so by means of agriculture, which, with its focus on the soil, produced a metaphoric England, a Tempe or unfallen Eden that contrasted with other less temperate climates. In this context, John Barrell has appraised the painterly techniques that georgic poets used (Barrell 1972: 19–20). These techniques make particular sense in conjunction with Renaissance cartography, since the theory of perspective, with its concepts of distance, viewpoint, and vanishing point, coincides with the projective geometry of Renaissance maps (Dilke 1987: 189). Distance materializes as a triumphal global survey in the three poems considered here, Philips's *Cyder*, Thomson's *The Seasons*, and Dyer's *The Fleece*, producing a counterpoint to earth-bound labor. From viewpoints like the known center on a map one could gaze at familiar nations, and then at ever more distant locales, until projected coastlines became metaphoric vanishing points, the "various capes/ Not . . . figured on the sailor's chart" (*The Fleece*, iv. 678–9).

A rudimentary cartography can be found in the first georgic poem of the century, John Philips's *Cyder*, which celebrates the Act of Union with Scotland (1707). Although *Cyder*'s cartography is primitive by comparison to that of *The Seasons* and *The Fleece*, it raises two questions regarding the relationship between cartography and poetic place. What is the abstract principle that guides the cartographies of these poems? How, like cartographers following Ptolemy, do these georgics distort contemporary knowledge in order to retain their central point of reference? The referential, conventional, and emblematic dimensions of both cartography and poetry bear on these questions.

Like most georgics, *Cyder* claims Milton as its precedent poet; uses the techniques of a British industry or pursuit as its occasional purpose; selects a place in Britain as emblematic of the threefold nation (Scotland, England, and Wales); and places Britain within a brief but telling survey of the globe. The relationship between poetry and place in georgic poetry was typified from the first decade of the century as both Miltonic and nationalistic, local and geographic. Philips's poem makes the global implications of British nationhood most emphatically explicit in its final lines, in which he predicts that cider brewed in Siluria, Britain's heartland, will be borne over the globe and infuse the waterways of other nations. In this hydrographic vision he retools the final two books of *Paradise Lost* by plotting a history yet to be realized on foreign waterways "well blended" with "*Silurian* Cyder" (ii. 662, 668). The roll call of place-names, topography, and peoples emphasizes the social embeddedness of the map within which Great Britain lies: Mauritania, Cathay, the Turk, Thule, and the Indus. Regionally the poet begins with west Africa, progresses eastward to China, back to the land "of the unbaptiz'd *Turk*," north to Thule, and then south again to "Araby" and "Indus" (the north-west coast of India) (ii. 650–6). Philips cites these regions as "extreamest Climes" (ii. 654), and therefore, by exclusion, defines Britain as the central, temperate point on the globe. The poem's final panegyric accrues meaning, however, as it consciously or unconsciously revisits the medieval T–O map, in which the world was depicted as a circumference divided into three parts. The entire northern hemisphere was Asia, divided from Europe and Africa by a continuous waterway defined as the Don River (Tanais) to the left and the Nile (Nilus) to the right. These formed the crossbar of a capital T. The lower hemisphere of the map was equally divided by a downstroke, the vertical waterway of the Mediterranean, between Europe on the left and Africa on the right. As Norman Thrower points out, the T–O map's geography was determined by a known world, with Asia, at its apex, its vanishing point. It also, however, schematizes the Christian cross and places Jerusalem, the heart of the conflict between Christendom and Islam, at the midpoint of the crossbar (Thrower 1996: 41–2). Like Barbauld's emblematic reorientation of Priestley's study, Philips's geography reorients the T by capsizing the crossbar and rotating the map one quarter to establish a northern orientation. With these modifications, the points of the cross are marked by Thule at the apex, Mauritania to the extreme left, and Cathay to the extreme right. The center of the crossbar is still the central region of east–west contention. Just as importantly, though, Philips's geography reproduces not merely a T–O construction of the world, but a restricted version of the Ptolemaic "inhabitable" world: in Ptolemy's schema Thule marked the northernmost parallel and Anti-Meroë, approximately 16° south of the equator, the southernmost. Philips's crossbar implies that there is an "inhabitable" world beyond which Silurian cider will not flow. These emblematic bounds restrict the "where-e'er" of the comic bombast with which the poem concludes:

> . . . where-e'er the *British* spread
> Triumphant Banners, or their Fame has reach'd

Diffusive, to the utmost Bounds of this
Wide Universe, *Silurian* Cyder borne
Shall please all Tasts, and triumph o'er the Vine.
(ii. 665–9)

The specified geographic region of this symbolic cartography takes commercial interest, represented by the local industry of cider, as its point of departure and closes in a coalescence of Protestant belief, mercantile ambition, and a representation of the civilizable portion of the world.

Philips's vision of Britain is not unique [*see* ch. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"]. Pope's influential *Windsor-Forest*, which followed the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), celebrates the role of British water with a graphic simplicity that resonates with the dividing waterways of the T–O map, in which "Seas but join the Regions they divide" (l. 400). Philips and Pope both depict Great Britain as a "geobody," using simple hydrographic axes to decode its "territory, and its related values and practices" (Thongchai 1994: x). Thomson and Dyer expand on these uncomplicated but emblematically significant maps, bringing to them the appearance of coordinate geography that discloses "th' unbounded Scheme of Things" (*The Seasons*, "Summer," l. 330). They not only chart the colonial empire to the west and traditional oriental regions – North Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and China – but also cite by name or topographical feature nations inventoried by contemporary maps under the rubric of Ultra-, Extra-, or Further-Ganges, or even simply India: the diverse continental and insular region that we now refer to as southeast Asia and southwest China. The specificity of their references abound with the logic of coordinate maps rather than the emblematic map that Barbauld assembles. They reject the static inhabitable world that underpins Philips's poem, substituting a vertiginous array of place-names that introduce mobility into the broad survey of "unbounded Commerce" ("Summer," l. 1012). Their allegiance to Milton materializes not only through the revision of his plot and rhetorical allusions to his work, but also in their re-enactment of Satan's flight through chaos and the Ptolemaic spheres of the universe. Like that Satanic flight, their poems provide a broad survey of Earth, which culminates when "Here matter new to gaze the devil met / Undazzled, far and wide his eye commands . . ." (*Paradise Lost*, iii. 613–14). Like Milton, they refer to ancient and contemporary maps, both of which were popular in Britain's fashionable map industry, and also, very likely, to geographic dictionaries. They also emulate Philips, who became the point of reference for georgic in the eighteenth century, but expand on his cartographic hint. Like him they use industry as an occasional purpose – in Dyer's case, the wool industry; in Thomson's, more elusively, the production of Britain itself. Each refers to a cartography that places England in Britain and Britain in the world – a placement strategy that locates England in both time and space as the prime meridian of the globe. But, as their knowledge of Milton's cartographic strategies reveals, the relationship between Britain and the space of the mapped world privileges the powerful English literary tradition over cartographic advances. Their georgics recede through

frames of reference that lend authenticity to a nationalizing project by transmitting myths about the relationship of Britain to its soil and to the lands of the globe. Their poetic atlases conjure exotic, bizarre, unwholesome, or simply distant locales that, despite occasional critiques of vicious practices in Britain, contrast with the gentle topography that Britain's

> goodly Prospect spreads around,
> Of Hills, and Dales, and Woods, and Lawns, and Spires,
> And glittering Towns, and gilded Streams, till all
> The stretching Landskip into Smoke decays!
> ("Summer," ll. 1438–41)

An emblematic system is as important to these poems as to Barbauld's and Philips's, and puts cartography to other tests than latitude and longitude.

Dyer's use of place-names dazzles, even bewilders, more than Thomson's; he displays a greater interest in navigational charts and uses cartography more blatantly as a means of ordering knowledge. But *The Seasons* held more power for eighteenth-century readers than *The Fleece*. Rather than relying, like Philips, on widely separated spatial coordinates to project Britain's commercial potential, Thomson uses them to build networks of knowledge that produce Britain itself, with its English heart. His use of the atlas is promiscuous, organized thematically rather than through ever-widening circumferences, as one might expect from his insistent references to bursting prospects, the circling deep, wide surveys, and so forth. The importance of cartography to his formation of place, though most evident in his dozens of geographic references, is also allusively figured throughout the poem. The poet's omniscient vision of the world, of distant places that could be printed, framed, and hung on the walls of a study, such as Priestley's, mimics the curious observer scrutinizing an atlas. In this vein Thomson obliquely describes God's activity as that of a great mapmaker, the cartographer of "The *great eternal Scheme*, / Involving All, and in a *perfect Whole* / Uniting, as the Prospect wider spreads" ("Winter," ll. 1046–8), and imperiously questions the cynic, "whose universal Eye / Has swept at once th' unbounded Scheme of Things" and found it meaningless ("Summer," ll. 329–30).

A first-time reader's sense of Thomson's poem is probably that of disorganization within organization, erratic displays of spatial knowledge within the intuitive temporal regulation of the seasons, since internal relationships stem from the stratification of a complex schematic. In addition to the mildly chaotic effect of georgic conventions – metaphrasis (in this poem translating the atlas, rather than agricultural instructions in a technical manual, into poetry), loco-description, classical and biblical similes, and interpolated tales – the seasons are layered roughly on the times of the day, these on foreign climes, and foreign climes on a climatic theory of human nature: "Worlds / In Worlds inclos'd" ("Summer," ll. 313–14). As a result, temporal classifications such as summer or noon produce spatial classifications such as, in "Summer," the tropics, which yield inventories of tropical countries and topographies: Sennar, Nubia,

Abyssinia, the Nile, Gojam, Cormandel, Malabar, the Menam, and the Indus ("Summer," ll. 750–831, *passim*). These yield inventories of vegetation, and wild animals, which yield further inventories of resources: "ambrosial Food, rich Gums, and spicy Health" ("Summer," l. 866), which allow him to make comparisons with Britain's less tangible goods:

> Progressive Truth, the patient Force of Thought,
> Investigation calm whose silent Powers
> Command the World, the LIGHT that leads to HEAVEN;
> Kind equal Rule, the Government of Laws,
> And all-protecting FREEDOM, which alone
> Sustains the Name and Dignity of Man:
> These are not theirs.
>
> ("Summer," ll. 878–84)

The fact that Thomson is not consistent in this stratifying schema – indeed, such stratification would be too complex to maintain and too predictable if he were – has the odd effect of granting authenticity to his inventories. Thus in "Autumn," the seasonal equivalent of evening, he counterpoints the anticipated loco-descriptive convention of an evening ascent of a local hill or promontory with raw geology: "lay the Mountains bare! and wide display / Their hidden Structure to th' astonished View!" ("Autumn," ll. 779–80). The inventory of mountains that follows gives the appearance of great precision: Taurus (on the south-east rim of the Anatolian Plateau), Hemus (a Balkan range), Olympus (Greece, but with mythological import), the Dofrine Hills (in the region of the Heccla volcano in Iceland), the Caucasus (near the Caspian Sea), the Riphaean range (mythical, but located between the Danube and Tisa in Ptolemy's *Geographia*), Atlas and the Mountains of the Moon (both in Africa, the latter named by Ptolemy), and the Andes (South America) evoke a mongrel assortment with the fundamental aim of emblematizing Britain's normativity, centrality, and veracity.

As this example indicates, Thomson's inventories, like Barbauld's, relate primarily to classification schemes rather than global regions. As a result he can strategically exclude Britain from his catalogues and provide it with a place of its own. In *The Seasons* Britain, despite its social ills, is the terrestrial paradise, the point of the globe that would, in the earliest maps, have occupied a mythological vanishing point. Spatially, it is the only Place in a wilderness of toponymies; temporally, it is Spring. Appropriately, then, "Spring" lists the fewest foreign points on the globe. In Thomson's revision of "Winter" (1730 edition), Spring not only initiates the book, but becomes its global circumference: the "bounded View" of winter opens to an emblematic nationalism in which "The storms of WINTRY TIME will quickly pass, / And one unbounded SPRING encircle All" ("Winter," ll. 1066, 1068–9).

Thomson's global and local inventories define Britain's geobody, including not only its benign topography but also a well-rounded citizenry that occupies the spectrum of human behaviors from the heroic to the brutal. Although he early calls the "generous BRITONS" to the georgic theme of "venerat[ing] the Plow" ("Spring,"

l. 67), his gesture is conventional. His earthy theme produces Britain as a fortunate, redeemed, and powerful nation among the nations on the globe. The riot of foreign realms invoked by inventories that range from rivers to bird migrations contrasts with his intimate knowledge of Britain as a familiar place well trodden by its folk, memorialized by its history, and possessing a native industriousness that leads to commercial power.

Dyer similarly provides thematized inventories of nations, although his are based on the process of wool production; and he also shows the differing emblematic uses to which coordinate cartography can be put. Book IV traces the navigational routes and *entrepôts* (urban centers from Venice to Canton in which resources were trafficked) that underscore his unadulterated celebration of industry:

> Or turn the compass o'er the painted chart,
> To mark the ways of traffic; Volga's stream,
> Cold Hudson's cloudy straits, warm Afric's cape,
> Latium's firm roads, the Ptolemean fosse,
> And China's long canals . . .
>
> (ii. 509–13)

Despite their resemblance to routes mapped the previous century and earlier, Dyer does not, as he promises, "scan in ordered course / Each object singly . . ." (i. 182–3). His navigation and land routes conjure a vibrant, far-flung commercial trade, but more importantly a series of histories: developmental, of Britain from savagery to cultivated commerce; declensionist, of the demise of once prosperous empires; navigational, required by the industry of wool-dyeing; and religious, like that encoded by Philips's T–O map, of the contest between Europeans and Muslims.

Dyer's most familiar navigational routes follow European trade from the Mediterranean to Africa, down its west coast and around the Cape of Good Hope to Madagascar, from there to India, from India into the continent and archipelagoes of southeast Asia, and thence to China and Japan; or, alternatively, from Britain to the Americas, through the Strait of Magellan, up the west coast of South America, and across the Pacific to the South Seas. These surveys, some doubtful, some not, some newsworthy, others drawn from Milton or the classical maps of cartographers such as Ptolemy and Ortelius, celebrate Britain's ability to manage its own earthy industries and therefore those of the world. *The Fleece* celebrates commerce mobilized by Britain with redemptive potential for the globe and for Britain's own paupers. Faithful to the conventions of georgic poetry, this eighteenth-century poem uses commerce to emblematize Britain's commercial gaze at the skirts of the world well before the reification of the second Empire, during which Britain shifted its commercial sights from the West and its American colonies to the East. The purpose of the navigational map in his poem is not to guide the traveler from place to place, but to provide a literary figure for geographic precision, when precision is not its purpose at all.

Geometric Terrain

Thomson's and Dyer's georgics contrast markedly with Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour*, which, though sometimes loosely described as georgic, exhibits crucial differences from georgic's conventional, referential, and emblematic functions. Though it complies with the conventions of invocation, classical simile, the invention of a history (in this case of the fall of men rather than Eve), and description of labor, it is more accurately a labor poem cast in the familiar eighteenth-century mode of invective [*see* ch. 27, "Verse Satire"]. Most tellingly, Collier's account of labor is not metaphrastic but experiential, and she makes no attempt, as was customary among georgic poets, to equate manual labor with the intellectual labor of the poet. Her poem's cartography results from the metonymic inventories of foreign countries encountered through the textiles that she launders:

> Heaps of fine Linen we before us view,
> Whereon to lay our Strength and Patience too;
> Cambricks and Muslins, which our Ladies wear,
> Laces and Edgings, costly, fine, and rare,
> Which must be wash'd with utmost Skill and Care;
> With Holland Shirts, Ruffles and Fringes too,
> Fashions which our Fore-fathers never knew.
> (ll. 157–63)

These textiles from Holland, France, India, and Belgium accumulate meaning when contextualized by her reference to the Islamic Turk (l. 66) and her cross-reference to Stephen Duck's "*sooty Peas*" (Collier, *The Woman's Labour*, l. 220; Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, l. 64), which, in his words, "Make us so much like *Ethiopians* look" (l. 67). Starkly conventional by the time Collier wrote this poem, these religious and racial commonplaces for Muslims and Africans disclose the conventional subtext of coordinate cartography, its power to place English labor against that of foreign nations. The counter-narratives Collier weaves in her classical and biblical metaphors and similes support her critique of Stephen Duck's mockery of both women and myths of labor in georgic poetry. She ascribes the predicament of woman not to sin but to a declensionist history of masculine behavior (ll. 10–30). Her epithets reinterpret classical touchstones of natural beauty through the calendar of daily toil: Orion, which "glitters in the Skies / In *Winter* Nights," indicates the hour that washing begins (ll. 143–4); the moment when "bright *Sol* illuminates the Skies" marks the approach of the shrewish mistress (l. 168). The pastoral inversion with which she closes the poem constitutes the most biting indictment of the georgic tradition:

> So the industrious Bees do hourly strive
> To bring their Loads of Honey to the Hive;

Their sordid Owners always reap the Gains,
And poorly recompense their Toil and Pains.
(ll. 243–6)

Collier uses the seasons as a loco-descriptive convention, but she rejects Spring altogether, with its pastoral and nationalistic nostalgia. Her poem nevertheless shapes the contours of British soil.

Without coordinate cartography, Collier's poem has no mathematical vanishing point and therefore does not, like Thomson and Dyer's powerful myths of the relationship of people to land, plot British soil in terms of the ever-widening globe. Thomson and Dyer simulate referential accuracy even when they supply false adjacencies between noncontiguous areas; erase timelines through lists of classical, mythical, and contemporary place-names; and, in Dyer's case, provide misinformation on route maps. They redistribute space by obscuring the relationship between referential and emblematic places. Collier's distribution of space, by contrast, seems predominately functional, since she represents land as locations mediated by actual experience, a strategy that provides a more intimate myth of the relation of people to the land. The locations on her map project a topography based geometrically on the triangle and represented by the places of labor: home, field, and the great house of the local gentry. Home, the magnetic pole of this geometry, generates two vectors, the silent paths that mark connections between the locations of labor: from home to field and from home to great house. In this schema, she charges that, unlike male laborers, women exchange work for work (l. 203). Two observations by Yi-Fu Tuan pertain to the geometry of the invisible trodden ways that join the locations of labor. First, space is "that which allows movement," while place provides "pause"; second, "Space assumes a rough coordinate frame centered on the mobile and purposive self" (Tuan 1977: 6, 12). Tuan's observations shrewdly distinguish between place and space, but also suggest the nostalgic perspective of the armchair traveler. Collier does indeed create a "mobile and purposive self," but her paths mark an absence in mobile space, while her places simultaneously mark the mobile space of labor and the immobility of the laboring place. She does not, like Tuan, imbue place with longing for the familiar, which both represent most dramatically in the person of the mother. In Collier's poem "mother" is indeed the sign of "place" for the child, yet "child" more accurately functions for the mother as one more sign of labor (Tuan 1977: 29; *The Woman's Labour*, ll. 93–120).

Collier's geometric terrain falls somewhere between coordinate cartography and emblematic geography. Like Thomson and Dyer, Collier establishes a network of knowledge derived from her experience as washerwoman, brewer, charwoman, and sometime haymaker. Her terrain, like the coordinate map, is projective yet familiar, its geometry masked by conventions of eighteenth-century invective and loco-description; it is static, yet mobilized by modes of labor and the unspoken routes that join them. Thus topographical coordinates underlie Collier's inventories of the bodily excesses of the laboring women she emblematically maps: the weight of an

infant; the requirement of "ten hands" (l. 108); sweat and blood; scarified hands and fingers; and, most profoundly, a destination marked by the certain excess of "*Old Age* and *Poverty*" (l. 201). The networks of knowledge she reveals coordinate the geometry of terrain with the body of labor.

Collier's poem clarifies cartography's reach beyond the myth of purely conceptual representation. Tuan points out that "all people undertake to change amorphous space into articulated geography" (Tuan 1977: 83); human geography makes sense of the conversations, rituals, and histories that constitute human placement. As the very different poetries of Barbauld's emblematic geography, georgic's coordinate cartography, and Collier's geometric terrain illustrate, the poetry of place enables us to "circle all or part" of the earth "around which the heavens and the stars revolve" (Berlinghieri, quoted by Brotton 1997: 23). As mapmakers illuminated the extraordinary compass rose, which had functional implications for the lives of venturers, navigators, and ordinary sailors, so poets such as Collier positioned place in terms of longing, enterprise, and invective, a veridical rhetoric of labor. Such poetry uses convention, reference, and emblem as rhetorical placement devices that chart peoples within a nation, and a nation within an earthy geography.

See also chs. 2, "Poetry, Politics, and Empire"; 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 15, "Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, and Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*"; 16, "Mary Leapor, 'Crumble-Hall' "; 29, "The Georgic."

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40

Rural Poetry and the Self-Taught Tradition

Bridget Keegan

In 1781, "An Unlettered Bard" produced an unremarkable poem entitled "Verses Written Under a Hill." Populated with pastoral deities and overrun with lambkins, the poem is worthy of attention because of where it is set: *under* a hill. The poet's unlettered state appears to have confined him to experiencing the landscape from a lower position, precluding the expansive, elevated prospect view of the countryside favored by polite poets. While the scope of the poem is far less ambitious than that of Thomson's *Seasons* or Jago's *Edge-hill*, it neatly illustrates one way that laboring-class poets responded to mainstream poetic conventions for writing about the countryside. They worked within them but also transformed them. To varying degrees and with varying effects, laboring-class poets remind readers how their social position led them to produce poetry that resembles but revises the kind of poetry produced by their more refined contemporaries. In this essay, I shall use the terms "self-taught poet" and "laboring-class poet" interchangeably. For a discussion of the problems in labeling and categorizing these poets, the first chapter of William J. Christmas's *The Lab'ring Muses* is useful (Christmas 2001: 39–62). For a broad survey of the works of many of the hundreds of poets from socially marginal backgrounds, see the three-volume collection of *Eighteenth-Century Labouring-Class Poets* (Goodridge 2003).

Much eighteenth-century poetry about the rural countryside privileges the visual sense in order to create distance between observer and observed, with the poet regarding the rural scene often from far above it, sometimes from the vantage point of a hill or other elevation. From the groundbreaking work of Raymond Williams or John Barrell to more recent studies such as those of Tim Fulford or Rachel Crawford, modern critics agree that eighteenth-century topographical poets use the elevated perspective to distance themselves from rural nature, symbolically asserting control over the countryside. The literal elevation of the poet's prospect has clear ideological implications. As Crawford notes, this can be heard in the pun created by the word "prospect": "Built into this concept is . . . the *double entendre* . . . in which the viewer's apprehension of space presupposes an analogue in the viewer's expectations or fortune"

(Crawford 2002: 26). The elevated view belongs to those with social and economic opportunities and the poets who wrote for them. As Fulford observes, "Through the prospect-view, the propertied classes were able to present their political dominance as confirmed by the natural scene." Demonstrating the appropriate aesthetic response to nature served as "a mark of the viewer's gentlemanliness" and "a criterion for the exercise of legitimate social and political power" (Fulford 1996: 3).

Self-taught poets, with more straitened socio-cultural expectations, ought thus to provide an entirely different perspective on the countryside. It might be supposed that their depiction would remove distances, offer readers a greater sense of immediacy, and be more "realistic." But it would be misleading to claim that, on the whole, laboring-class poets were "closer to nature" simply because many had worked as agricultural laborers. Regardless of the poet's social background, the human relationship to nature is always mediated by language, although the means by which linguistic mediation occurs can vary. The poet's social rank affected his or her representation of nature, but often in unpredictable ways. Thus a good deal of laboring-class poetry about nature appears more imitative of mainstream trends than resistant to them, and few poets flout conventions as efficiently as the "Unlettered Bard." A more understated commentary, present only obliquely in individual poets, resounds more clearly when read through the works of the hundreds of laboring-class poets who wrote in the period between 1700 and 1830, and grows louder toward the end of the century. While the diversity of poets publishing precludes claiming a single master narrative, there are significant commonalities in their writing.

Most accounts of eighteenth-century self-taught poetry begin with Stephen Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* in 1730 and end with John Clare's enclosure elegies in the 1830s. Both Duck and Clare offer important correctives to the conventions for writing about nature during their respective literary historical moments, as John Goodridge has discussed in *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Goodridge 1995) [*see* ch. 15, "Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, and Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*"]. In *The Thresher's Labour*, Duck represents agricultural labor from the ground up, showing it at close range and from a first-person perspective. He challenges the conventions of early eighteenth-century georgic, including Addison's famous dictum distinguishing the work of the poet from that of the rural laborer. A century later, Clare expresses a presciently ecocentric view of the relationship between human and nonhuman nature. His poems about the devastation caused by enclosure provide a powerful critique of how class interests affected rural land use, both economically and aesthetically. The history of self-taught rural poetry is interestingly book-ended by these two poets. Yet what of the hundred years in between?

Duck and Clare each wrote about more than agricultural labor in the countryside. They also share a connection to an equally key feature of the British rural landscape: gardens. After his preferment, Duck was appointed the Librarian at Merlin's Cave in Richmond Gardens; Clare served for a time as a gardener's assistant at Burghley Park. A survey of the annals of eighteenth-century poetry shows that it is the garden, rather than the farm, that appears most often as the site where self-taught poets tested their

rights to write about the countryside. Despite the fact that they may have had to work in nature for their livelihood, many self-taught poets displayed a keen interest in the noninstrumental uses of nature reflected in garden landscapes. Moreover, for a greater part of the century, any political dimension of their work comes not from any protest against wages or working conditions, but rather from a desire to have the same rights as their social superiors to enjoy nature and the rural scenery and to claim pleasure and leisure in the countryside. Their arguments frequently see aesthetic abilities as a social equalizer.

At a cultural moment in which the leisure classes' experience of nature was being regulated by increasingly curatorial standards, many of these poets were engaged in the ultimately political claim that they too, regardless of their social background, were capable of mastering the dominant idiom for reading and writing about landscape. Their insistence on imitating the perspectives of their social betters in their representations of the countryside is thus a form of resistance, although it is one that is easy to misread as mystification. The very mastery of conventions can be seen as a powerful critique in itself. In showing an ability to write within polite forms, the poets engaged in a literary version of what Lawrence Klein has labeled "social tranvestitism" (Klein 1995: 374–5). The ease with which polite forms – whether in behavior or in literature – could be learned and adopted undermined any claims that these forms were innate to those of a more elevated social standing.

Mastering the idioms of the dominant culture is, for those who are marginalized by it, the first step toward resistance. As Jonathan Rose argues in a discussion of Ann Yearsley, "culture was a force for equality and was destructive of ideology, including the ideology supporting the British class structure. That hierarchy rested on the presumption that the lower orders lacked the moral and mental equipment necessary to play a governing role in society. By discrediting that assumption, autodidacts demolished justifications of privilege" (Rose 2001: 20–1). Self-taught poets demonstrated their moral and intellectual fitness by exhibiting the proper aesthetic responses to the natural world around them: they would show that they knew both the beautiful and the good, and thus, implicitly, had a claim to certain political rights that a "gentlemanly" appreciation for landscape had been used to underwrite.

While literary gardens have long served as important sites for assertions of and challenges to hierarchies (as *Paradise Lost* makes clear), actual gardens and parks became even more significant arenas of class conflict during the eighteenth century, as engrossments and emparkments, fueled by tastes for picturesque landscapes, did as much damage to the laboring classes' access to land as agricultural enclosures. The political significance of gardens was connected with issues of social status in other ways. Stephen Bending has argued that the garden in this period becomes a space where one can demonstrate "membership of a polite culture far broader than the landed elite. In this respect, the garden acts as a venue for the polite battles within a society beginning to recognize divisions of class rather than rank . . . The garden's ability to naturalize political power in the eighteenth century makes it a space to be fought over all the more strongly" (Bending 1998: 242). While several poets

represent gardens to underscore social differences, many writing in the early and middle years of the century also look to gardens as an idealized space where social differences might be erased through a common aesthetic appreciation for beauty, one shared by "refined" and "rustic" members of society. By the 1790s, however, the aesthetic arguments using the garden to posit an inherent human equality were giving way to more self-conscious assertions of the inescapability of class-based prejudices and the challenges of overcoming them.

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Peter Aram's "Studley Park" (1733) is the first major eighteenth-century autodidact garden poem, predating the publication of Duck's poems about Richmond Park by three years. Although Aram was not the gardener to Studley Park, he had been a gardener and then later a land steward, and was also the author of *A Practical Treatise of Flowers*. "Studley Park" does not reflect Aram's experiences as a poet who also labored in the garden in order to physically create the scenes he describes. His self-presentation reflects a literary knowledge of garden writing as much as the lived knowledge of a practicing gardener, and his poem is replete with allusions to his literary predecessors. Yet there is one significant convention that Aram does not follow. The poem is not dedicated to the park's owner John Aislabie, but to Mr. William Fisher, his Gardener-in-Chief. With this gesture, Aram underscores the fact that the garden's beauty is produced and enjoyed by both landowner and laborer. By creating the garden, and the poem about it, in implicit collaboration with their employer, Aram and Fisher partially erode the social differences that separate them.

Other poets turned to a more celebrated garden to explore questions of legitimacy, hierarchy, and their own social standing as self-taught poets. Richmond Park and Kew Gardens provided the ground upon which Duck, Henry Jones, and Thomas Chatterton figured their relationship to power through a rural setting. Enclosed in 1637 by Charles I, Richmond Park became controversial during the 1730s when Queen Caroline began extensive alterations, promoting on a grand scale the English style of gardening. William Kent's improvements to the landscape were read as attempting to connect the Hanoverian Court with a longer tradition of Englishness. Kent's designs included a number of pastoral follies that idealized the experience of rural life in a way that a poet like Duck would have known to be false. These follies served the ideological purpose of masking the hardships faced by rural working populations, and a modern reader might anachronistically expect Duck to speak out against such idealization, as he had implicitly done in his debut poem. He did not; in fact, he found himself quite literally at the geographical center of the controversies surrounding the Queen's efforts, as he was appointed Librarian (caretaker) of Merlin's Cave, the Park's most contentious addition.

Like many of the poets of the period, Duck wrote poems in praise of Richmond which even sympathizers, such as Raymond Williams, dismiss as formulaic and tedious, because they erase the class markers that make *The Thresher's Labour* inter-

esting to modern readers (Williams 1973). Duck's tribute to his royal patron, "On Richmond Park, and Royal Gardens," furthers the work of naturalizing the legitimacy of his Hanoverian patrons, and simultaneously works to naturalize Duck's self-taught intervention into the sub-genre of garden poetry. He invokes Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, most notably in his description of how "*Albion's* KING pursues the Royal Chace" (l. 85). He details how "Royal GEORGE, and Heav'nly CAROLINE" (l. 134) transformed the land from "A gloomy Waste, not worth the Muses Strain; / Where thorny Brakes the Traveller repell'd, / And Weeds and Thistles overspread the Field" (ll. 131–3). The subsequent stanza completes an epic simile likening their efforts to those of imperial Rome as it civilized the world, and the poem ends with a patriotic portrait of the King single-handedly protecting the nation from invasions and involvement in foreign war. The King's paternalistic care for his nation delights British swains, but Duck closes the poem with a portrait of the suffering of swains in other, more oppressive, countries, echoing Pope's account in *Windsor-Forest* of how English swains once suffered under the tyrannies of the Norman Yoke: "Poor Peasants with their rigid Burdens groan / And Till the Glebe for Harvests not their own" (ll. 193–4). The fruitfulness of the land, just as the beauty of the garden, is explicitly linked with British liberty, liberty that is protected and provided by the Hanoverian monarch.

Despite his humble origins, in this poem Duck writes with a confidence more laureate-like than thresher-like, praising the King while demonstrating mastery of polite conventions. Whatever its failings as a work of art, the poem demonstrates that Duck felt he had a right to write poetry addressing subjects of national interest. His laboring-class patriotism ought not be dismissed out of hand. In the poem, Duck also demonstrates his ability to aesthetically enjoy the landscape, as well as to draw political lessons from it, in the tradition of Milton, Denham, and Pope, all three of whom his poem cites. Duck's appreciation for nature's beauty in part legitimizes his commenting upon socio-political concerns. It demonstrates that the ability to read and appreciate natural beauty is a skill that can be acquired regardless of one's social background, and, as such, not the innate privilege of the upper classes. Duck's royalist poem is potentially leveling.

Several decades later, as Capability Brown was reshaping Kent's designs at Richmond and obliterating Merlin's Cave, another self-taught poet, the Irish-born bricklayer poet Henry Jones, wrote "Kew Garden" (1763). Even more than Duck, Jones works to connect the garden space with the monarch, George III, making Kew a mirror of the King himself. As Bending remarks: "It becomes difficult here to distinguish between monarchy and garden as each becomes the ideal of nature and art combined . . . both George's actions and the national 'garden' within which he acts demonstrate his liberal mind, his virtue, and his role as the bringer of concord and victory" (Bending 1998: 247). Echoing *Windsor-Forest*, Jones's description of this royal green space serves to celebrate Britain's international power, and his detailed inventory of its foreign plants and flowers symbolizes the extent of British imperial conquest. That these exotic plants are depicted as flourishing at Kew makes a clear

case for the benefits of colonialism, an argument that might appear paradoxical for a poet of Irish origins.

Jones's paean to royal power and national conquest embodied in the garden landscape did not go uncondemned, and it was another self-taught poet, Thomas Chatterton, who in 1770 wrote of Kew Garden to criticize royal corruption and the hacks who used their poetry to promote it. Kew remained an image of the nation, but a nation whose natural beauties had decayed because of the moral degradation of its leaders. Chatterton satirizes Jones's poem directly. Whereas Jones describes "temples celebrating the victories of the Seven Years War," Chatterton describes them as "shrines to tyranny and oppression." For Chatterton, "the garden maps out not a stable if various order but an unquenchable thirst for frivolous novelty" (Bending 1998: 249).

Chatterton's debate with Jones suggests how laboring-class poets politicized representations of the countryside and used such representations to debate with each other. Although the politics of Duck, Jones, and Chatterton are not recognizable as proto-proletarian identity politics, their writing about rural spaces has political significance, and represents their efforts to speak meaningfully about broader national concerns. The fact that writers from more marginal social origins felt that they were entitled to have a say about royal issues is important. It suggests that they felt enfranchised, rather than disenfranchised, because of their aesthetic appreciation of rural landscapes. The fact that they taught themselves such an appreciation implicitly challenges an essentialized social hierarchy. Certainly, the poets claim for themselves only the privilege of speaking about nature and the political circumstances it is made to symbolize; their arguments are not directly concerned with the rights of the poor in general. However, these earlier efforts lay some groundwork for later developments.

Garden scenes were not used only to make statements about monarchical prerogatives. The cobbler poet John Lucas turned toward the garden's religious symbolism in his allegorical poem "Philo's Garden, or a Description of the Garden of the Soul" (1776). The poem functions as an argument for the equality of souls, an argument that also had potentially revolutionary significance (one need only think of the fear caused by Methodism, as well as the long link in British history between radical theologies and leveling politics). The garden, too, is a figure for Lucas's poetry. It brings Philo great fame, and this fame lays him open to threats from the allegorical figures of Deceit and Envy. He defeats them, aided by Justice and Truth, and his garden grows all the more luxuriant. As a self-taught poet, Lucas turns toward garden imagery to elaborate his possession of a moral fitness that makes him the peer of any man, regardless of his material wealth.

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While numerous other self-taught poets used garden scenes and images in their poems, by far the most prolific eighteenth-century self-taught poet of gardens was the shoemaker poet James Woodhouse. Woodhouse was jointly "discovered" in 1758 by the poet William Shenstone, the Oxford Professor of Poetry Joseph Spence, and the

London publisher and bookseller Robert Dodsley. Shenstone's estate, the Leasowes, was located near to the estate of George, Lord Lyttelton: Whig politician, poet, patron of Thomson, and himself a landscape gardener. Woodhouse attracted Spence's and Dodsley's interest because he had composed two elegies to Shenstone, the first petitioning him for and the second thanking him for access to the grounds. Six years later, Dodsley would publish Woodhouse's first collection of poetry.

It is not insignificant that this encounter of plebeian and polite writers occurs in a particular kind of garden: the *ferme ornée*. Bringing together the instrumental and non-instrumental value of land, its agricultural and aesthetic uses, the *ferme ornée* foregrounds what would become, in the eighteenth century, the increasing disparity of these two functions. As Ann Bermingham has noted, this particular approach to land management did not catch on, because "the period made an increasingly rigid distinction between the landscape garden as the natural domain of the landlord and the agrarian landscape as the appropriate province of the laborer" (Bermingham 1986: 30). Thus the *ferme ornée* captures what was, for the eighteenth century, an increasingly impossible situation: namely, the ability of the leisured and laboring ranks to share a landscape, and to experience nature as both functional and beautiful, both observed and worked.

The Leasowes under Shenstone's ownership exemplified these contradictions. It was undeniably a working farm; Shenstone occasionally speaks in his letters of supervising the hay-making and the pleasure he takes in his livestock, in particular the raising of poultry. But, like more conventional garden spaces, the Leasowes contained purely picturesque, nonfunctional elements such as the serpentine pathways, decorative waterfalls, and evocatively placed statuettes and urns. Moreover, it was a landscape literally overwritten with English and Latin verse inscriptions and poetic allusions. To be able to read this landscape required a training in aesthetic appreciation and an education in the classics that someone who had to leave school at the age of seven, as Woodhouse did, would have been unlikely to possess.

But the problems posed by those unable to properly "read" the garden had less to do with knowledge of classical languages than with knowing how to maintain the proper "museum visitor's" distance from nature. In a letter of 1749, for instance, Shenstone complains of the visiting mob's "pillaging" of flowers, and in another letter he grumbles, "tho there are Primroses to be gather'd in the Fields in Plenty yet if they can discover one that is apparently planted, they are sure to crop it" (Mallam 1939: 141). Such crassness led Shenstone eventually to declare his property off-limits to common visitors; and it was this exclusionary punishment that inspired Woodhouse's first poetry. The "Advertisement" to *Poems on Several Occasions* (1764) details that Shenstone's

> benevolence was such, that he permitted the lowest of his neighbours the benefit of those delightful scenes; amongst whom was poor Crispin, our author; but his happiness was not of long continuance, for the liberty Mr. SHENSTONE's good-nature granted, was soon turned into licentiousness; the people destroying the shrubs, picking the flowers,

> breaking down the hedges, and doing him other damage, produced a prohibition to every one without application to himself or principal servants. (Goodridge 2003: vol. 2, 146)

The mob's eviction from this formerly productive landscape is emblematic of how emparkment furthered the deracination of the rural laboring class from productive farmland, and one wonders whether the vandalism may not have been intentional. But Shenstone appears to have read the incidents as an illustration of the mob's aesthetic and moral failings, their inability to properly read and respond to the garden setting.

The capacity for misreading the landscape was not confined to the mob. Even for those who considered themselves sophisticated enough to appreciate the Leasowes' mixed message, the intense allusiveness of Shenstone's inscriptions and other embellishments appeared to require explication. Dodsley's "A Description of the Leasowes," attached to the posthumous two-volume collection of Shenstone's poetry, was designed to provide such an explanation. As Shenstone's friend and publisher, Dodsley was in a privileged position to write about the beauties of the place. It might seem that a comparison of Dodsley's guide with Woodhouse's poetry would exemplify the differences between a refined and a rustic response to the Leasowes, but such is not the case. Dodsley does not speak from a purely "refined" perspective, nor does Woodhouse assume a purely "rustic" view. Despite Dodsley's apparent authority as an arbiter of refined taste, he was no aristocratic connoisseur, but a servant-class entrepreneur who had begun his career with a poem entitled "Servitude" (1729) and whose first published volume was entitled *A Muse in Livery, or the Footman's Miscellany* (1732). By 1758, Dodsley was Spence's traveling companion and a literary power broker, but in 1732 he submissively presented himself as a brother to Spence's earlier prodigy, Duck. Dodsley's "Epistle to Stephen Duck" begins with a request for indulgence for "An Infant Poet, and unlearn'd as you" (l. 8), and goes on to invoke Duck in defense of his own argument for the socially equalizing potential of cultural improvement:

> VIRGIL wrote not his ÆNEID in a Day:
> Nor is't impossible a Time might be,
> When POPE and PRIOR wrote like *You* and *Me.*
> 'Tis true, more Learning might their Works adorn,
> They wrote not from a *Pantry*, nor a *Barn*:
> Yet *They*, as well as *We*, by slow Degrees
> Must reach Perfection, and to write with Ease.
> (ll. 91–7)

Dodsley's talents allowed him to rise in the world, and his is one of the great success stories in the history of self-taught poets.

Though it is uncertain how much Woodhouse knew of Dodsley's past, in 1758 the two would have had more in common than Dodsley ever did with Duck. Woodhouse's poetry demonstrated he had learned a properly aestheticized response that guaranteed

that he would not mar the flowerbeds. In his poems, Woodhouse describes a relationship to a landscape that serves simultaneously as locus of distinction and as a possible social equalizer. Woodhouse writes in "An Elegy to William Shenstone":

> Tho' no auspicious rent-rolls grace my line,
> I boast the same original divine.
> Tho' niggard fate with-held her sordid ore,
> Yet liberal nature gave better store;
> Whose influence early did my mind inspire
> To read her works, and seek her mighty Sire.
> (ll. 15–20)

Woodhouse's rights to the land are not economic but aesthetic, bestowed upon him by "nature." But Woodhouse is not arguing for radical egalitarianism. His poetic sensibility does not elevate his fellow laborers, whose destructive actions have made them the equivalent of "Belial's sons" (l. 114). In his second elegy to Shenstone, Woodhouse distinguishes himself from the "ruthless crowds, disdaining bounds" (l. 47), speaking both from and against his plebeian subject position. Woodhouse's longest loco-descriptive poem "The Lessowes," written after Shenstone's death, serves the same guiding function as Dodsley's prose text. Although Woodhouse visits many of the same sites as Dodsley, he does not devote his lines to transcribing emblems or guiding the visitor's footsteps. Dodsley's text, though occasionally employing the first-person voice, is largely depersonalized and describes a depopulated landscape. By comparison, Woodhouse provides a highly personalized reaction to the sites and describes their intimate relation to him. Mentioning the inscription to Joseph Spence, Woodhouse writes: "He deigns to smile on meritorious lays; / And Crispin's numbers are to him as dear / As equal merit in a prince or peer" (ll. 511–13). Woodhouse elsewhere records his personal response to the garden's altars, urns, and inscriptions. He highlights the origin of that response in such an unlikely source as his own pen, and in so doing he calls attention to his excluded position in the social landscape even as he claims his equality in being able to demonstrate a proper response to the landscape's texts.

Such a paradoxical strategy is revealed in another element that Woodhouse includes, but Dodsley overlooks, in his description of the *ferme ornée*. While Dodsley's account is concerned with nonfunctional ornamentation, Woodhouse, in "The Lessowes," gives us the farm. While his descriptions of rural labor are highly pastoralized, they record a working environment nonetheless:

> Here nymphs and swains the shining pitchfork wield,
> To spread the swarth, or turn the with'ring field;
> There, rang'd with rakes, the shining wind-rows seen,
> In length'ning stripes; or cocks bespot the green:
> And there, with mixed tools, a jovial train

Mould larger cocks, or load the groaning wain,
Or comb the reliques of the scatter'd plain.
(ll. 672–8)

The "shining pitchfork" and the "jovial train" may seem idealized, but Woodhouse's goal is partly to dissociate himself from that which he is representing. He does not link himself with the real nymphs and swains. If Woodhouse dubs himself a "poor plebeian swain" (l. 262), the modest label masks higher aspirations. The lesson he learns under Shenstone's patronage makes him wish to free himself from manual labor, and he muses on the lost possibilities that literary success might have brought:

No longer, then, I'd pine a landless boor,
Nor trudge, thro' sloughs around a rented door,
In russet garb, whose ragged rent-holes grin,
And ill conceal the skeleton within:
Nor heavy hours in listless labour waste;
Nor pall, with viands coarse, my blunted taste;
Nor ken unornamented murkey walls;
Nor join the chorus of domestic brawls;
Nor lend an ear to leaden senseless chat,
Or the shrill clamours of each squalling brat:
Nor wish I sceptre, diadem, and throne,
But, HORACE-like, a vill and farm my own;
To range among my lawns, my streams, my trees,
Such as he wish'd; or rather, such as these.
(ll. 440–53)

Work in nature is the partial subject of the poem, but Woodhouse depicts it as something to be escaped through his art. While he sees himself owning a farm, he does not see himself working on it, merely ranging within it.

The Horatian bliss Woodhouse imagines here was not to be his. Shenstone's death caused "Crispin," at the conclusion of the poem, to dash his lyre to bits in grief. Woodhouse would remain publicly silent for twenty years after his first volume. During that time he became a servant to Shenstone's neighbor, Lord Lyttelton, and was later taken on as land steward by Elizabeth Montagu. After a falling out with Montagu, he began to write again; but, unlike Dodsley, Woodhouse never converted his status as servant into the kind of cultural capital that had enabled Dodsley's success. Woodhouse ended his days as a London bookseller, living well into the early nineteenth century. He continued to write poems about polite landscape gardens until late in his career, publishing "Norbury Park" in 1803.

But Woodhouse's verse autobiography, *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus* (which was published in full only in the late nineteenth century, though it was largely composed in the late eighteenth century and published in partial form, pseudonymously, in 1814) reflects a very different point of view. The hope that aesthetic

preferences could override social differences disappeared, and Woodhouse writes bitterly of how aristocratic landscapes exploit and disenfranchise rural laborers.

> Behold! Ye Rich! the wretch'd brood around! . . .
> They build your Domes, where Deities might dwell –
> And will not You allow some lowly Cell;
> Some simple Hovel – Hut – or sheltering Shed,
> Where they may drink their water – break their bread;
> When bread they have, and weary limbs may lie,
> Secure from fierce attacks of stormy sky –
> And where, when all their pence, on wants, are spent,
> No feudal Churl can come to rail for Rent? . . .
> They fence Your Gardens – force Your fruits to grow –
> And will not You some petty patch bestow,
> Where Industry may find its frugal dish,
> While God gives You game – ven'son – fowls – and fish?
> They dress Your meadows – fertilize Your field;
> And ought not You some small inclosure yield,
> Where each may range, or rest, when Sundays shine,
> Look round their little spot, and cry – 'tis Mine?
> (Woodhouse 1896: vol. 1, 58)

Woodhouse, in his later writing, illustrates the changes that had developed in self-taught writing about rural topics. It was not merely self-taught poets who began to draw attention to the ways in which the wealthier classes' desire for picturesque gardens deracinated and impoverished rural inhabitants. By the later part of the century, Oliver Goldsmith had brought such a critique into the mainstream of polite poetry [*see* ch. 22, "OLIVER GOLDSMITH, *THE DESERTED VILLAGE*, AND GEORGE CRABBE, *THE VILLAGE*"]. And in the last decades of the eighteenth century laboring-class poets wrote more frequently about the failure of garden spaces to bring a wished-for social equality based on a common aesthetic appreciation of nature.

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Like Woodhouse, Ann Yearsley saw herself excluded from garden spaces, and particularly from garden spaces privileged by poetry. As a woman and a laborer, she was doubly barred from gentlemanly landscapes. She too writes of that exclusion, one that her poetry fails discursively to overcome. "Written on a Visit," from Yearsley's second collection (1787), details her visit to Twickenham and her rapturous and appropriate aesthetic responses to its beauties. As Donna Landry summarizes, Yearsley turns to Twickenham because it "served Pope well as a retreat from public criticism, and so will serve her as a retreat from everyday hardship" (Landry 1990: 53). Yet the poem's concluding stanzas deny that hope:

Yet, Precept! shall thy richest store be mine,
When soft'ning pleasure would invade my breast;
To thee my struggling spirit shall resign;
On thy cold bosom will I sink to rest.
Farwel, ye groves! and when the friendly moon
Tempts each fair sister o'er the vernal green,
Oh, may each lovely maid reflect how soon
Lactilla saw, and sighing left the scene.
(ll. 45–52, in Yearsley 1787)

As Landry argues, what forces Yearsley to depart is the recognition that the idealized and serenely unproductive landscape "cannot mean for her what it meant for Pope . . . there is a difference between the liberties that a financially secure poet with many powerful friends can take in verse and the liberties that a Lactilla can afford" (Landry 1990: 54).

The significance of garden spaces as a site for more explicit class conflict is fully underscored in a 1791 poem by John Learmont, *The Petition of the Journeymen Gardeners of Scotland, (and we shall take in the North of England, for connection's sake,) to the Nobility and Gentry of these Realms*. Just like Aram in the early part of the century, Learmont makes quite sure in the opening stanzas that the gentlemanly viewer is well aware upon whose labor his beauteous prospects depend, and that there is labor even in what appears to be a non-working landscape:

Look round amang your balmy bowers, –
Thae smiling witnesses are ours; –
An' a' the family of flowers
Attest our hand,
Do cause their scentit innate powers
Fairer expand.
When vertical yon potent sun,
An' you at ease i' shades sit down,
We pantin' toil 'neath heat o' noon,
Or gather fruit,
(Sic as auld Eden weel might own,)
To cool ye we't.
. . .
In short, whate'er's sublime or great,
Or worth while seein' round your seat,
Or renders nature's dress complete,
To cleek the een,
We do, an' toil 'neath streams o' sweat
Baith morn an e'en.
(ll. 25–36, 43–8)

Learmont's inventory of what the gardeners' labors afford allows him to introduce a practical argument for an increase in the gardeners' wages. To further his point, he

details what else the "grit fock" (l. 55) waste their money upon – money that should be paid to the gardeners.

Learmont at once provides a more "realistic" portrayal of how garden spaces are produced. He unmasks the hard work needed to create the artifice of the unworked landscape, yet at the same time he understands the theoretical aesthetic principles behind that work:

> What wad avail Corinthian order
> Gif near it nettles shed disorder?
> Or frowin' to its base or border
> Rude nature a'
> Her quagmires – stagnant pools like ordure –
> Did to us shaw?
> (ll. 49–54)

Learmont knows both Corinthian order and nature's quagmires, and is under no illusion about the effort needed to reconcile the two. Yet, if these two contraries might be reconciled, might the gardeners and the "Lords, Dukes, Princes" (l. 1) for whom they work also be drawn together?

If the differences between master and servant cannot be resolved, Learmont insinuates another means toward erasing class differences. Addressing the ladies for the first time in a later section of the poem, Learmont writes:

> An' ye' fair ladies i' your bowers,
> Whase charms eclipse the fairest flowers,
> Come an' spend a' ye're orrow hours
> 'Mang groves an' glades;
> An' we will ever bend as yours
> The Gardener Lads
> (ll. 49–54)

If the gardeners' demands are not met – and perhaps even if they are – the gardeners hold the ability to threaten the legitimacy of the lord's patrimony, throwing into question the purity of aristocratic bloodlines.

Even when they did not write as explicitly politically as Learmont does, laboring-class poets frequently questioned the rights of certain classes to claim privileged views of nature. Their impulse in the earlier part of the century was often to elevate themselves alone to the gentleman's prospect, as in the cases of Duck, Dodsley, Jones, and Woodhouse. However, by the end of the century, we begin to encounter a more explicit expression of the desire for the general human equality symbolized by a prelapsarian garden, as in Lucas's and Learmont's poems. Learmont unequivocally asserts in the epigraph to his poem: "The FATHER of all MEN was a GARDENER."

See also chs. 14, "James Thomson, *The Seasons*"; 15, "Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, and Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*"; 16, "Mary Leapor, 'Crumble-Hall'"; 22, "Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*, and George Crabbe, *The Village*"; 29, "The Georgic."

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41
Poetry Beyond the English Borders

Gerard Carruthers

The longstanding critical emphasis on patriotic antiquarianism, including Scots-language revival, has tended to obscure the diffuse, more contemporary, and "British" impetuses behind eighteenth-century Scottish poetry. Allan Ramsay (1684–1758) is a key figure in the re-energizing of poetry in Scots. He was also a Scoto-British Augustan, as concerned as Pope, Addison, and Steele were in England to usher in an age of urbane culture. Ramsay was also a Jacobite Tory, loyal to "James III and VIII," the exiled Stuart claimant to the British throne. He criticized the Union of English and Scottish Parliaments in 1707 for cementing a pan-British cultural hegemony of low-church Whigs (mainly Presbyterians in Scotland) who supported the new-fangled Hanoverian dynasty. From his Scottish locus Ramsay dismissed the Presbyterian Whigs as a continuation of the "fanatical," aesthetically puritanical outlook of the Scottish Reformation. He was thus an enthusiast for Scottish "folk" culture including song, proverb, and bawdry. Ramsay's retrieval of folk materials is not an indicator of any proto-democratic impulses. Rather, it accords with his publication of medieval, Renaissance, and seventeenth-century Scottish texts (both in English and in Scots) and a "bottle Jacobitism" which prompted him to rework Cavalier drinking-songs (songs associated with the Royalist side during the English Civil Wars of the 1640s). Ramsay compiled a portfolio of wide literary compass deliberately to contradict what he took to be the dour, fundamentalist, aesthetic-denying outlook of Calvinist Scotland that had helped demolish the supposed cultural flowering of the Restoration of the Stuarts between 1660 and 1688. His Stuart-loyal project of literary and cultural reconstruction idealized a recently deposed age of political and cultural harmony and so takes its place as an identifiable, though slanted, Augustan corridor in Scotland.

The printing of Ramsay's first published work, *A Poem to the Memory of the Famous Archibald Pitcairn, M.D.* (1713), was funded by members of the "Easy Club" in Edinburgh, a group that took its name from a notion of urbane moderation derived from the journalistic writings of Addison and Steele. Subscribing to polite Augustan mores, the Easy Club, clearly, was also Jacobite. Ramsay's text is at once both a

complaint against the treachery of the Scottish peers who had engineered parliamentary union and, in its elegant couplets and its depiction of Pitcairne traversing Hades, an example of neoclassical Scottish culture associated with the pro-Stuart circle of Pitcairne (1652–1713) and Thomas Ruddiman (1674–1757). Ramsay had originally adopted the Easy Club pseudonym "Isaac Bickerstaff" (the mystical writer Bickerstaff was one of Swift's spoof inventions) to show his gentlemanly mocking of superstition. But he subsequently changed his pseudonym to "Gawain Douglas," the famous sixteenth-century Scottish poet, author of a notable translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Many critics have seen Ramsay's identity-swap – from English to Scottish – as a symptom of a national identity crisis in eighteenth-century Scottish writing. However, it reflects instead Ramsay's untroubled ambidexterity or concentric identity as simultaneously Scottish, Stuart-loyal, antiquarian patriot, and man of modern British culture.

As part of the Pitcairne–Ruddiman circle in Edinburgh in the early 1700s, Ramsay was a cultural activist who sought to reinstate "high" literary culture in Scotland. Ruddiman's ornate edition of Gavin Douglas's Scots-language version of the *Aeneid* (1710) was a marker of national cultural pride. Douglas's early sixteenth-century work had long predated any accomplished translations of Virgil's text into English. Its large Scots glossary also helped Ramsay to begin publishing his own original poems in Scots. His first poems in Scots, published from 1718, included the *tour de force* "Lucky Spence's Last Advice." This poem, much lauded in twentieth-century criticism for its apparent earthiness and vigor, might more fruitfully be read as a dialogue between the realms of low and high culture. Lucky Spence, the Edinburgh brothel-keeper, wishes to dispense some parting words from her deathbed. She gathers around her her "loving Lasses" – a phrase that shows Ramsay's typically condensed Augustan wit (l. 7, in Ramsay 1951–74: vol. 1, 22). She advises her girls to threaten customers who refuse to pay for the services they have just enjoyed by reporting them to the Kirk (the Scottish Church). She warns them to avoid pursuing grievances against soldiers, whose peripatetic lifestyle makes it near-impossible to bring them to any kind of justice. The poem is culturally reductive from the beginning, with its framing of the "wisdom" of its "important" personage. It contains a covert Tory critique of a crassly mercantilist society under Whig rule. "Lucky Spence" satirizes Scottish "misrule" in the paradoxical usefulness that the entrepreneurial brothel-madam finds in the Presbyterian Church, with its conveniently shaming public stool of repentance, and a dissolute Hanoverian soldiery that symbolizes a wider British malaise. Where the wrong dynasty rules, the effects filter down through society so that it becomes comprehensively rotten and perverted in its authority.

"Lucky Spence" is written in the "Habbie Simpson" stanza, which Ramsay had encountered in the Jacobite James Watson's *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems* (1706–11), specifically in "The Life and Death of the Piper of Kilbarchan," attributed to Robert Sempill of Beltrees who had fought on the royalist side in the Civil Wars. This stanza – signifying for Ramsay Cavalier *joie de vivre* – becomes one of two principal cultural signatures for Scots-language poets throughout the rest of the eighteenth century. In its scatological vein, Ramsay's poem shares a Swiftian

humor and reflects also Ramsay's role in Edinburgh as a bookseller. "Lucky Spence" anticipates the larger-scale treatment of the prostitute as central character in Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722). It also shares traits with the popular reading sold by the poet in chapbook and broadside form satirizing the cheap life of the London streets, a tradition going back to Ben Jonson – a writer adored by Ramsay as another lasher of Puritanism. Traditional criticism has emphasized the comedy and missed the serious cultural comment in Ramsay's Scots poetry (David Daiches, for instance, writes of his "school-boy snigger" [Daiches 1964: 28]). But of course gleeful laughter and social disapproval can coexist, just as the poem's low-life location exists within a high cultural frame of reference. "Lucky Spence" is a "mock elegy" that requires knowledge of the classical elegy for its full comedic effect. In much of Ramsay's work this binary tension is present in a way that arguably contradicts his ideal of a well-functioning and organic culture.

In 1718 Ramsay produced a version of "Christ's Kirk on the Green" from which the other predominant stanza of the eighteenth-century Scots poetry revival is taken. Yet again this marks out the poet's Stuart loyalism, for the piece was traditionally attributed to James V. Such sovereign-authored poetry reinforced the notion of a king who could observe with delight riotously popular festivity (different in theory, if not in practice, from the lower-class anarchy that is found in "Lucky Spence's Last Advice"). Tellingly, in adding a canto to the text Ramsay makes the scenario less hedonistic than in the original medieval part of the poem. Ramsay's pastoral drama *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725) features a stock situation where, with the Restoration, the rightful heir to a Scottish country estate discovers his real identity. His hidden life in the country, where he has learned good, clean folk songs and has enjoyed an education in rational, non-superstitious philosophic and religious principles, equips him well for his new role.

John Gay was clearly an influence on Ramsay, but there was some reciprocation. Gay, like Pope, was a subscriber to the showpiece edition of Ramsay's *Poems* of 1721. *The Gentle Shepherd* anticipates the new pastoralism of *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). Scottish critics who narrowly confine Ramsay's *Fables and Tales* of 1722 to an exclusively Scottish tradition harking back to the medieval poet Robert Henryson fail to recognize that this work also belongs to a wider British trend in the eighteenth century influenced by the French fable-writer Antoine Houdar de la Motte. Ramsay's *Fables and Tales* predate Gay's first *Fables* of 1727. Some of Ramsay's best original poetry includes pieces in Scots English, such as "Wealth, or the Woody" (1720), which, with refined metaphorical skill, satirizes the South Sea Bubble [*see* ch. 1, "POETRY, POLITICS, AND THE RISE OF PARTY"], and "The Prospect of Plenty" (1720), which boasts of Scotland's resources of seafood and beauty around its coasts (a patriotic gesture responding to England's pride in its pastoral landscape and the contrasting idea of Scotland's natural impoverishment). Most Scottish criticism and anthologizing, driven by modern, one-dimensional nationalism, has had little to say about such works in its preference for Ramsay's "purer" Scots poems of city life, and in the process has failed properly to identify Ramsay the Scoto-British Augustan.

William Hamilton of Gilbertfield (*c.*1665–1751) was one of many Scottish poets energized by Ramsay. The pair exchanged a series of witty, discursive Scots verse epistles, again demonstrating both an Augustan cultural mode and an ideal of urbanity at work in Scotland as elsewhere in the British Isles at this time. Hamilton also shared with Ramsay an interest in Scotland's historic poetry, translating Blind Hary's fifteenth-century *Wallace* into English in 1722. Hamilton shows here his limited confidence in contemporary Scots as a literary medium, and the same can be said of James Thomson. As familiar with spoken Scots as with English in his formative years in the borders and Edinburgh, Thomson made only one attempt to write in the manner that was then being made fashionable by Ramsay, in his "An Elegy Upon James Therburn in Chatto" (1719), written in the "Habbie" stanza. For confidence in Scots on a large literary scale after Ramsay we have to wait for *Helenore, The Fortunate Shepherdess* (1768) by Alexander Ross (1699–1784). A standard, melodramatic, pastoral story of kidnap and rescue, this work of over two thousand couplets is in a purer dialect (of the north-east) than anything Ramsay had attempted. It is also highly attentive to local, peasant cultural traditions, such as belief in the ghostly supernatural (something that Ramsay had consistently mocked) and even the realism of childbirth. If the predilections of the earlier Scots classical or humanist agenda of Ruddiman is found in the mode of *Helenore*, the influence of the Enlightenment is apparent in its elements of sociological observation.

Robert Fergusson (1750–74) is the poet who most comprehensively adopts and extends Ramsay's political and poetic vision. Fergusson writes a series of Scots poems in the "Habbie" stanza and makes use also to a much greater extent than Ramsay of the "Christ's Kirk" stanza. This was channeled to the younger poet as a useful vehicle for original work by the example of John Skinner (1721–1807) in "The Christmass Bawing of Monimusk" (1739), which incorporated a modern Scots idiom. Fergusson's first publications were songs for operas performed in Edinburgh where, after attending St Andrew's University, the poet found employment as a lawyer's clerk. These and other song sequences, most notably "The Rivers of Scotland, An Ode" (1773), which was set to music by John Collett, form an ambitious project to promote Scottish airs, of which Fergusson was a devoted student. Discounted by twentieth-century Scottish criticism as an "English" production, "The Rivers of Scotland" patriotically follows the water pastoralism developed by Allan Ramsay in "The Prospect of Plenty" – a work that celebrates the beauty and beneficence of Scotland's fluid environment. His first publications in *The Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement* edited by Walter Ruddiman (1719–1781, nephew of Thomas) were also written in English. Fergusson's hostility to English prejudices against Scotland as a savage place devoid of culture (John Wilkes particularly incensed him) prompted him to paint scenes of Tory neoclassical order in the Scottish landscape. Fergusson wrote well in English throughout his short career, but his subsequently most celebrated work (not well known either in Edinburgh or elsewhere until Burns championed Fergusson's reputation in the late 1780s) was written in Scots. In January 1772 the *Weekly Magazine* published "The Daft-Days," a work in the "Habbie" stanza that delivered a latinate Scots language,

marking an apotheosis of confidence in Scots poetry of the eighteenth century. The poem begins observing the winter scene:

> Now mirk December's dowie face
>   Glours our the rigs wi' sour grimace,
> While, thro' his *minimum* of space,
>   The bleer-ey'd sun,
> Wi' blinkin light and stealing pace,
>   His race doth run.
>   (ll. 1–6, in Fergusson 1954: vol. 1)

Humankind is pictured taking shelter from the inhospitable elements in "Auld Reikie" (l. 19) – an affectionate and, down to Fergusson's day, a Jacobite term for Edinburgh. Here though, in spite of attempts at comfort by the people as, in healthy, almost sacramental terms, "round they gar the bicker roll" (l. 23) there is also a threatening presence, particularized by the city's police force, which takes great pleasure in abusing the would-be merry citizenry. This city guard comprises former Highland soldiers now employed by the Whig magistrates of the capital to operate a tight control according to authoritarian and puritanical predilections. Fergusson refers to the guard in a number of his works as the "black banditti" (l. 65), emphasizing their deep displacement from a home location, the Highlands, naturally Stuart-loyal territory. For Fergusson, the Scottish Highlander in the service of the Hanoverian state is an emblem of a Scottish community and nation out of kilter with the natural order of things. "The Daft-Days" – a term for the New Year holidays – signals a split culture, both indicating approbation for the festival going back to pre-Reformation times and connoting contempt in the later usage of Calvinistic Whigs.

As with Ramsay, there has been a tendency in Scottish criticism to see Fergusson as a poet of revelry, when in fact his depiction of festive release is frequently predicated on a jaundiced view of the cultural and political control of late eighteenth-century Scotland. Such composition is apparent in another of Fergusson's "holiday" poems, "The King's Birth-Day in Edinburgh" (1772), where the city guard is lampooned as it attempts to fire Mons Meg in salute to King George III, but explodes the gun by overfilling it. This farcical image, however, incorporates a darker metaphor as the narrator addresses the gun, "I fear they bang'd thy belly fu' / Against the law" (ll. 35–6). Symbolic rape along with violence and drunkenness (much of it exercised by the city guard), respectable people being assaulted with fireworks and drowned cats, and pathetic ex-soldiers queuing for charitable handouts from the Crown purse point, as with Ramsay, to an Edinburgh, Scotland, and Britain suffering under misrule.

Fergusson's depiction of an anarchic Edinburgh is counterpointed in his Scots poems by moments of pastoral harmony, indicating obliquely that which is interfered with by Hanoverian rule. We see this, for instance, in "Hallow-Fair" (1773), where in the stanza of "Christ's Kirk" the ordinary folk are seen to gather on a beautiful starlit Halloween night to enjoy honest, homely fare and chatter. In accordance with

the "Christ's Kirk" genre, the orderly scene descends into grotesque chaos; however, it is not the excesses of the people as such that precipitates the change, but the heavy-handed attentions of the city guard who arrive to police the occasion. Among Fergusson's most explicit political works is "The Ghaists: A Kirk-yard Eclogue" (1773) which complains that Scotland was being drained financially as a result of the 1707 Union establishing a distant, uninterested government in London. If such anti-unionism, traditionally wielded as a matter of expedience by Jacobites, is as yet not to be termed "nationalism," "The Ghaists" shows the beginnings of a serious interrogation of London centralism in Scottish literature. A similar critique of the drawbacks of the Union may be found in Tobias Smollett's novel *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771). Fergusson is to be found at his most measured in "Auld Reikie" (1773), a nuanced portrait of Edinburgh, at times affectionate, at times hinting at a sinister underbelly to the metropolis, as it moves through a day from morning until night across 184 couplets (in the complete version not published until 1779). Here again in Fergusson's work we find the Scots revival in its most extended form as we are taken on a tour of the various social classes of Edinburgh and the life of the city is revealed as a complex, contradictory set of human motivations. It is in "Auld Reikie" that Fergusson's Tory prejudice against the city as repository of Whig values – crass commerce and moral chaos – finally evaporates. Instead of the Muse fleeing from a nightmarish Edinburgh (the characteristic ending of many of his poems), she takes a more positive view of the capital as a delightful melting pot.

> REIKIE, farewel! I ne'er could part
> Wi' thee but wi' a dowy heart;
> Aft frae the *Fifan* coast I've seen,
> Thee tow'ring on thy summit green;
> So glowr the saints when first is given
> A fav'rite keek o' glore and heaven;
> On earth nae mair they bend their ein,
> But quick assume angelic mein;
> So I on *Fife* wad glowr no more,
> But gallop'd to *Edina*'s shore.
> (ll. 359–68)

If "Auld Reikie" marks a moment of freedom from prefabricated ideological attitude in Scots poetry, it is a poem that has invited twentieth-century Scottish criticism to over-emphasize "documentary realism" and proto-democratic propensities in Scots poetry at the expense of the intense high cultural project of literary and cultural restoration that Scots poetry from Ramsay to Fergusson sought to promote. The reception of Robert Burns (1759–1796), in his time and since, demonstrates the failure to recognize both indigenous and wider literary amplitude. In part, this has to do with Burns's innovative ability to transform the Scots poetry tradition that he received from Allan Ramsay and especially from Robert Fergusson. Burns himself promulgated Fergusson's work (even paying for the erection of a monument at Fergusson's grave

in Edinburgh) and brought him a much wider popularity in the 1780s than he had enjoyed in his lifetime. When Burns began to come to notice, Ramsay was a household name but Fergusson was dead, not so much forgotten but never having been more than little known beyond the small Tory grouping which had read Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine*. Burns encountered a volume of Fergusson's poems by chance, in 1783 or 1784, and from his predecessor inherited an armory of attitudes which he adapted to his own very different background in rural, Presbyterian Ayrshire.

The most dramatic example of this indebtedness relates to Burns's local notoriety during 1785 when his satires on Calvinism, "The Holy Fair" and "Holy Willie's Prayer," were passed around in manuscript form between lawyers, teachers, merchants, and others of the educated middle classes to which Burns, as a tenant farmer, essentially belonged. In these poems Burns goes further than Ramsay or Fergusson in castigating fanaticism and superstition in the predominant religious mentality of Scotland. "The Holy Fair," modeled on Fergusson's "Hallow-Fair," similarly employs a highly dextrous use of the "Christ's Kirk" stanza, but chooses a startlingly different kind of "festive" occasion. It focuses on the mass gatherings during summer when Presbyterians in the west of Scotland would congregate for field preaching and communion. Burns portrays a crowd more interested in drinking and communing sexually than spiritually. Indeed, amid the enthusiastic fire sermons, he detects sexual sublimation and excitement. One "auld licht" preacher is reduced in his bestial aspect so that he becomes porcine (slyly, then, the poet has attached to the man of God an aspect associated with the demonic):

> Hear how he clears the points o' Faith
> Wi' rattlin an' thumpin!
> Now meekly calm, now wild in wrath,
> He's stampan, an' he's jumpan!
> His lenghthen'd chin, his turn'd up snout,
> His eldritch squeel an' gestures,
> O how they fire the heart devout,
> Like cantharidian plaisters
> On sic a day!
> (ll. 109–17, in Burns 1968: vol. 1)

Here we find both broad comedy but also searing psychological insight derived from Burns's education in the period of Scottish Enlightenment, especially (Adam) Smithian ideas of sympathy, where the spectator is invited to place him- or herself in the shoes of others.

The poems were enjoyed by a receptive local audience – members of a satellite Ayrshire Enlightenment who were rational, even skeptical, in religion – but they caused outrage among more traditional Presbyterians in Burns's home vicinity. Burns, from a Calvinist background himself, had adopted and extended the scathing critique of Calvinism he had found in earlier eighteenth-century Scots poetry. If "The Holy Fair" could find its way into Burns's first publication, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish*

Dialect (the "Kilmarnock" edition of 1786), the much more sexually explicit "Holy Willie's Prayer" was not published in a full, official version until long after Burns's death. Burns was a shock to the system of mainstream Scotland. But the polite literati of Edinburgh, with little awareness of the literary precedents upon which Burns drew (the acidic wit of Pope, the scatological interest of Swift as much as the deeply anti-Calvinist attitude of Ramsay and Fergusson), embraced Burns as the "heaven-taught ploughman" and attributed his occasional lapses in taste to his rural rudeness rather than his literary influences.

Burns's own collaboration in his self-image as inspired, natural poet contributed to this literary amnesia. We find an example of this in "The Cotter's Saturday Night" (again written in 1785), the most popular among genteel readers of his first book of poems. This poem is often read as though Burns simply drew on actual observation of the scene he conjures; yet in fact it relies heavily on British literary antecedents and a highly modern sensibility. Modeled on Robert Fergusson's "The Farmer's Ingle" (1773), Burns's poem does something that Fergusson, or Ramsay before him, would never have thought of doing – rehabilitating the figure of the Presbyterian. Fergusson's poem, part of the primitivist movement which equates rustic minimalism with the well-adjusted life, portrays a peasantry of hard work, healthy fare, and simple culture that includes both believing in ghost stories and laughing at the harsh moralizing of the kirk. Burns, however, shows a Presbyterian patriarch who, following a week of hard labor, gathers around him his family and servants so that he might read to them from scripture. The poem can be seen as a tribute to Burns's own recently deceased father, a tenant farmer, who, despite his occasional sternness (he had disapproved of his son taking fashionable dancing lessons), had embraced a moderate form of Calvinism with an emphasis upon charity and good works. "The Cotter's Saturday Night" counters the stereotype (collaborated in by a Britain-wide confederacy including, of course, his predecessors in eighteenth-century Scots poetry) of the dour, fanatical Scottish "Whig." Indeed, Burns finds in the simple form of worship of the cotter and his family something of the sublime:

> They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
> They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim:
> Perhaps *Dundee's* wild-warbling measures rise,
> Or plaintive *Martyrs*, worthy of the name;
> Or noble *Elgin* beets the heaven-ward flame,
> The sweetest far of SCOTIA'S holy lays:
> Compar'd with these, *Italian trills* are tame;
> The tickl'd ears no heart-felt raptures raise;
> Nae unison hae they, with our CREATOR'S praise.
> (ll. 109–17)

Following in Fergusson's footsteps, Burns here adopts the Spenserian stanza, confirming a Britain-wide brand of eighteenth-century literary antiquarianism and finding in it a particularly appropriate Protestant vehicle for his subject matter. "The

Cotter's Saturday Night" is one of Burns's many performances that point to his great synthesizing abilities.

"To a Louse, On Seeing one on a Lady's Bonnet at Church" (another of Burns's poems from arguably his most productive year of 1784–5) sees the poet using the "Habbie" stanza, the success of which here and elsewhere soon saw it renamed in popular usage the "Burns" stanza. In producing what is essentially an ode in the "Habbie" stanza, Burns employs his vehicle for thoughtful, philosophic purposes in a way that surpasses the serious usage made of it even by Fergusson. The broad surface comedy, where the narrator berates an insect for daring to set foot upon a well-made-up young lady while at church, gives way to an essay on the actual presumption of humanity, with its "airs in dress an' gait" (l. 47), seeing itself as separate from the sphere of nature. "To a Louse" is a deliberately ambiguous poem that both mocks humanity and, in its observation of Jenny, who believes herself to be subject to the gaze of admiration rather than of horror, also extends to the human condition some affectionate sympathy for its efforts to differentiate itself from the rest of the animal kingdom. This dualism in attitude is found in two of the most celebrated lines in Burns: "O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us / *To see oursels as others see us!*" (ll. 43–4) – lines sometimes taken to demonstrate Burns's common-sense country wisdom, but that actually make use of Adam Smith's notion, promulgated in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), of objective spectatorship. Drawing together the resources of the Enlightenment and of the vernacular poetic tradition of the eighteenth century, "To a Louse" shows the mature modernity of poetry in Scots in the proto-Romantic moment as inhabited by Burns.

Unlike Scotland, Ireland and Wales had no real literary traditions in a distinctive, cousin language to English to build upon in the eighteenth century. It is revealing that the Belfast-born James Arbuckle (d. 1742) should indulge in sub-Pope productions like *Snuff* (1717) and, at the same time, hail Allan Ramsay in Scots for his urbane, almost Augustan poetic sensibility with its "native Stock . . . So full of pleasant Jests and Wit" ("To Mr. Allan Ramsay on the Publication of his Poems" [1721], ll. 17, 22, in Ramsay 1954: vol. 1). Like many Irish Presbyterians, Arbuckle, a student at Glasgow University, played his part in promoting the revival of Scots-language poetry. It should not be thought, however, that this activism was to the deliberate exclusion of an "Irish" identity, since it is carried out partly under the name of "Hibernicus" in the *Dublin Journal*. It is here in 1725 that Arbuckle championed the old Scots ballad "Hardiknute," of which he writes, "there is a Life, and a Nobleness both of Design and Expression, that might have become the *Augustan* Age" (Arbuckle 1729: vol. 1, 129–30). An even more dramatic Irish cultural traveler is John Toland (1670–1722) of County Donegal, who rejected his native Gaelic and Catholicism and became a free-thinker; his *Poems on Affairs of State*, published in London in 1703, identified with the religious iconoclasm and political republicanism of John Milton, whose works he also edited. Beneath the apparently urbane title of his book, Toland is intent on a plain speaking that qualifies what he sees as the facile eloquence of the early eighteenth century. "Clito: A Poem on the Force of Eloquence" begins: "In

common Words I vulgar things will tell, / And in Discourse not finely speak, but well" (ll. 1–2, in Carpenter 1998), and castigates Popery and political corruption in a messianic language that harks back to the previous century. Toland, who found an audience among English dissenters, demonstrates an energy running counter to the emerging British cultural consensus of the day. Less interesting in his cultural lineaments, though much more lauded in his day than either Toland or Arbuckle, is Nahum Tate (1652–1715), whose "Panacea: A Poem upon Tea" (1700), published after he had moved from Dublin to London, was an obvious attempt to tap into the mainstream. Ironically enough, the bland couplets and nondescript subject matter, treated without even light humor in his poem, indicate an anxiety to be accepted that throws into sharp relief the untroubled individuality of the major Irish writers such as Swift, the Congreves, Goldsmith, and Sheridan who were adopted into the "English" literary mainstream during the eighteenth century.

As in Scotland during the eighteenth century, poetry in English from Ireland celebrated the customs and topography of the nation with a new-found ease. This is perhaps especially so with "Mully of Mountown" (?1704) by William King (1663–1712), a poem about a milk-cow in County Dublin, thought by some in a recently fraught climate of civil warfare to be a coded political allegory. James Ward (1691–1736) produced the much more substantial "Phoenix Park" (1724) in *Windsor-Forest* mode, and his "The Smock Race at Finglas" (1724) deploys a mock-heroic style and tone which again reveal indebtedness to Pope. Interestingly, in its setting on the green, and its noise and crowd scenes, Ward shows here a debt also to the Scottish "Christ's Kirk on the Green" genre then being popularized by Allan Ramsay. Matthew Concanen (1701–49), in his *A Match at Football: A Poem in Three Cantos* (?1720), pins local custom on a much more classicized mock-heroic fabric, and does so with a great deal of aplomb, even though the final effect is strangely dissonant.

Pope very carefully published poems by Thomas Parnell (1679–1718), the year after he had died an alcoholic, selecting pieces such as "The Hermit" and "A Night-Piece on Death" which fly in the face of an actually rather disgruntled life (Parnell 1722). Aside from Swift, Parnell is the most substantially individual Irish poet in the opening decades of the eighteenth century. Spending much time in London, he was a rather reluctant clergyman in his native country, of whose people and environment he took a somewhat withering view. Parnell's is a sensibility that looks toward and probably influences the "graveyard" school of Blair, Gray, and Young.

If Parnell perhaps felt himself in a cultural void in Ireland, other poets found Swift's presence energizing, in negative as well as positive fashion. Jonathan Smedley (*c.*1672–1729) might have attached to St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, verses later appearing to some commotion in *Gulliveriana* (London, 1728), which satirized the political views and religious outlook of Swift on the day he was installed as dean in 1713. Others, including Patrick Delany (*c.*1685–1768), husband and wife Mathew Pilkington (1701–74) and Laetitia Pilkington (*c.*1708–50), Mary Barber (*c.*1685–1755), and Constantina Grierson (*c.*1705–32), were all strongly supported by Swift – who, however, had a formidable record of falling out with many of

these writers after offering initially profuse and over-lavish praise. Swift's rather self-consciously constructed literary circle in and around Dublin is ultimately more interesting for its sociological dynamics and, perhaps, its cultural psychology than for its poetic output.

Among the more resonant Irish verse of the eighteenth century are the carefully philosophic "Universal Beauty" (1735) by Henry Brooke (*c.*1703–83), seen as an inspiration to Erasmus Darwin's "The Botanic Garden," and "A Friend in Need is a Friend in Deed" (1737), a poem by James Sterling (1701–63) about whaling that deals seriously with the particular economic plight of Ireland in the context of world trade. Laurence Whyte (*c.*1683–1755) writes on the mechanics of verse-forms in his "Essay on Dunning" (1740), as well as animadverting on landlord absenteeism. His namesake, Samuel Whyte (1733–1811), acknowledged by his pupil Thomas Moore as his most influential instructor in English Literature, published *The Shamrock: or Hibernian Cresses* (Dublin, 1772). This included mediocre work by Samuel Whyte himself on Dublin, and the work of others, including King's "Mully of Mountown," and was perhaps the most popular "Irish" anthology of the century until *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789), compiled by Charlotte Brooke (*c.*1740–93), which printed for the first time extensive and accurate English translations of Ireland's Gaelic poetry culture.

The tradition of non-English poetry in Wales, even more than in Ireland or in Scotland (where Gaelic was poetically at least as able as Scots or English) looms large beside that of the nation's poetry in English in the eighteenth century. As in the case of Scotland and Ireland, the cultural pull of London exerted itself on ambitious Welsh poets, so that John Dyer (1699–1757) became a member of the circle of Aaron Hill and produced "Grongar Hill" (1716–1726), a celebration of the topography of his native Aberglasne area that is emotionally charged (a facet that helped draw the admiration of William Wordsworth). Dyer's *The Fleece* (begun 1743; published 1757) is worth mentioning because it pays close attention to the processes of sheep-rearing within the Virgilian mode and so again engages with the rural scene with a directness that is atypical for its time. [*See* ch. 29, "The Georgic."] Pembrokeshire-born David Lewis (?1683–1760), displays a fairly rare Welsh anxiety to adopt the most resolute "English" Augustan mores, becoming a mediocre member of the Pope outer circle and editing collections that included his own work alongside that of Pope and Dyer and translations of Horace, among others, in 1726 and 1730. Anna Williams (1706–83) received the careful assistance of Johnson in compiling her *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1766), though such affection was lavished on a highly mediocre versifier. Much more talented was Charles Hanbury Williams (1708–59), a career diplomat in Prussia and eastern Europe who produced a large quantity of skillful political, especially satirical, verse and whose collected works were annotated by Horace Walpole. Evan Lloyd (1734–76) produced a substantial quantity of verse satire, most notably "The Powers of the Pen" (1766), which casts some interesting sidelights on the debates of the day in literature.

The great Welsh corpus of hymns that developed during the eighteenth century might be mentioned in its crossover impact on "metropolitan" culture. William

Williams (1717–91), perhaps Wales's greatest hymnodist, produced two English collections, *Hosannah to the Son of David* (1759) and *Gloria in Excelsis* (1772), and Dafydd William (1720/1–94) published *Joy in the Tents of Zion* (1779); all of these exercised an influence in the English-speaking cultural sphere. Benjamin Francis (1734–99) is another writer who might be mentioned in this connection, though a number of his discursive English poems, including "Conflagration" (1770), are tedious. Evan Evans (1731–88) also provides a powerful Welsh conduit of influence. His *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards* (1764) responded to the desire for English translations of Welsh material by, among others, Thomas Gray. Evans's "The Love of Our Country" (1772) patriotically challenged English misunderstanding of Welsh history and culture. A highly significant provider of cultural symbiosis is Sir William Jones (1746–94), one of the prime movers of the "orientalist" influence in eighteenth-century culture, whose *Poems, consisting chiefly of translations from the Asiatick Languages* (1772) had a large impact.

Two other Welsh poets in English stand the test of time. Mary Robinson (1758–1800), a poet heavily indebted to Pope and Swift, was not without a measure of lyrical panache. Born in Bristol and educated by the More sisters, she was proud of her claimed aristocratic Welsh descent and produced a large corpus of work (beginning with *Poems* [1775]) of wide-ranging concern, less pertinent, however, for their Welsh subject matter than her fiction. Ann Julia Hatton (1764–1838) was likewise a more successful novelist than poet, though her *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1783) displays strikingly skillful prosody in places. Jane Cave (*c.*1754–1813), on the other hand, left little in the way of lasting literary merit. The Brecon-born daughter of an English exciseman stationed in Wales, her *Poems, on Various Subjects, Entertaining, Elegiac and Religious* (1783) went through four editions, though they are of interest today perhaps only for the historical light they throw on women of her class. Welsh poetry in English, like that in Ireland, presents altogether a highly diffuse situation, and, again, for the most part lacks the entangled "vernacular" accents of Scottish poetry.

See also chs. 1, "Poetry, Politics, and the Rise of Party"; 24, "Robert Burns, 'Tam o' Shanter'"; 34, "Augustanism and Pre-Romanticism."

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